Boku wa Tomodachi ga Sukunai Volume 05

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These are novel illustrations that were included in Volume 5

【著者】

平坂読
ひらさか・よみ

こないだ人と話していて「プリクラ」を「プリキュア」と言い間違えた瞬間、「あ、自分はもう一生リア充にはなれないんだな」と直感的に悟りました。

【イラストレーター】

ブリキ

扉を開け閉めするだけでも息が切れます……歳ですね。

カバーイラスト／ブリキ　装丁／blue

MF文庫 J
ひ-02-23

僕は友達が少ない⑤

平坂読

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メディアファクトリー

僕は友達が少ない⑤

ある日父・隼人から電話でよくわからない話を聞かされて驚く羽瀬川小鷹だったが、星奈にそれとなく確認してみたところ、彼女のほうは特に変わった様子もない。一応気にはなりつつも、隣人部ではいつものように残念な部員たちとの騒がしい日々が続いていく。遊園地に行ったり温泉に行ったり理科が作ったタイムマシンで過去に行ったり（!?）、いろんなところにGO（5巻だけに）！　隣人部の人間関係にも変化がおとずれる、はいてもいるしはいてなくもあり、ついているようでついてない、大人気残念系青春ラブコメディ、変化と原点回帰の二学期編突入！

MF文庫 J 平坂読の本

ホーンテッド!①〜④［イラスト：片瀬優］
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僕は友達が少ない⑤［イラスト：ブリキ］

僕は友達が少ない 5

平坂読
yomi hirasaka
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温泉での一幕

「あにき。
おせなかをお流しいたします」

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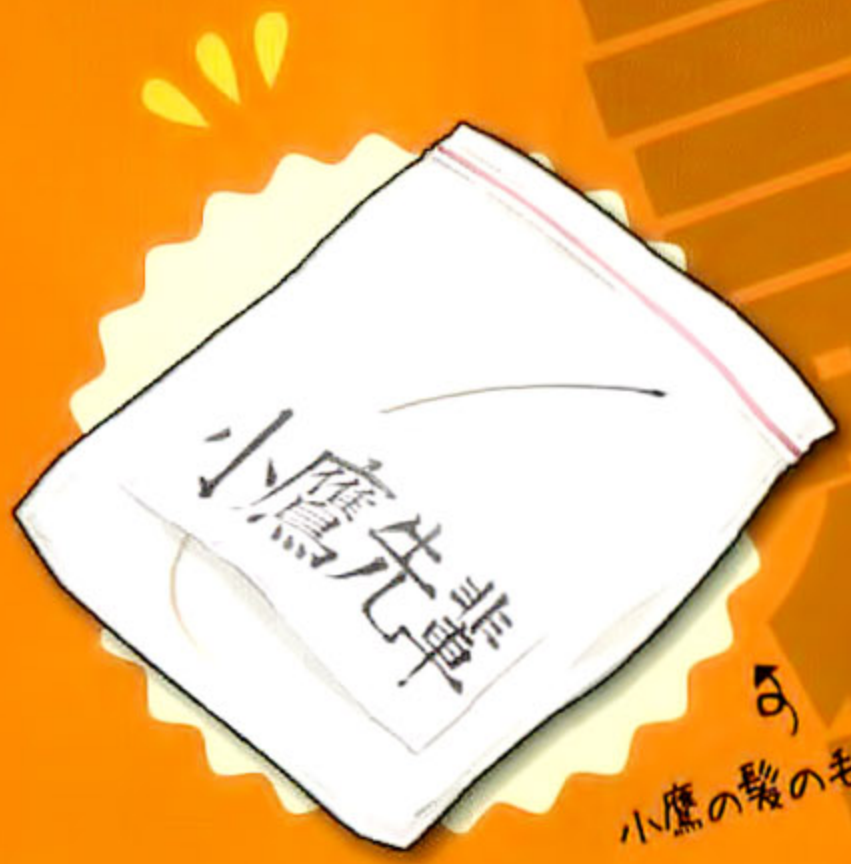

小鷹の髪の毛サンプル

A Phone Call With Dad

The last 10 days of September—— Our first semester finals had ended, and we were on the third day of our break.

The night of the day we played that (mostly mentally) tiring King Game in the Neighbors Club clubroom, I got a call from our dad, Hayato Hasegawa, who was currently working overseas.

A lot had happened, but I told Dad that Kobato and I were doing fine.

After that, Dad said something kind of confusing.

According to Dad's best friend "Zaki"—— The chairman of St. Chronica Academy Pegasus Kashiwazaki, who is also the father of Sena Kashiwazaki, one of the members of the Neighbors Club Kobato and I belong to——

I was engaged to his only daughter, that is to say, I was getting married to Sena.

.....

.....

...

"Huh?"

It was so sudden I didn't even feel surprised. All I could do was let out a simple "Huh?" in return.

"Hrmm."

Dad said over the phone, sounding unsure of where to go from here.

"Umm... Uh, I'm getting married?"

I asked in a casual voice, despite the fact that my brain was still frozen.

"That's what it sounds like."

"With who?"

"Zaki's daughter."

"Why?"

"Who knows?"

Dad said along with a little laugh.

"Haha."

I ended up laughing a little too for some reason.

I'm pretty sure laughing is the default reaction for a human when they don't know what to do.

"Umm... Did the chairman tell you that?"

"Yep," said Dad.

"Zaki just called me a few minutes ago. He seemed really pumped up about something too~ When I asked him why he was all giddy, he started asking me when we should hold the wedding and all that~ Looks like you're getting married to his girl—— Sena-chan, was it?—— is a done deal inside his head already."

"Ehhh..."

...Why would he even?

"Well, it did sound like Zaki had been drinking a while. It might've just been the alcohol doing the talking for him. Hell, not might, that's probably it."

"Ahh..."

The chairman really can't hold his liquor.

He had me drink a little with him that time I went to the Kashiwazaki estate before, but he passed out in no time, resulting in me having to share a...

...I don't want to think about that anymore.

"Haa... Can't do anything about him talking like a retard if he was drunk, now can we?"

I said, breathing a sigh of relief.

"Yeah, that's true. He's a funny guy when he's drunk though, let me tell ya~"

Dad said with a mixed nostalgic laugh.

However, he then continued, in a doubtful voice,

"...Ahh... But still, would you really think your daughter was getting married just because you got a little drunk...? He seemed a little too sure about it for it to be a little delusion of his..."

Dad said, now sounding somewhat worried.

"Kodaka, you sure you're not goin' out with Sena-chan or anythin'?"

"Wha!? Like hell I am!!"

I got all flustered after hearing Dad's ridiculous question.

"Realllyyy~?"

"Really!"

We see each other at the club every day, I've played games, gone to the pool, and studied with her... and I saw her n-naked that one time I think, but... We're definitely not going out, that's for sure.

"Man, you're so boring~"

"How am I boring...?"

I said, getting tired of all this.

"So, that means you got another girlfriend or two?"

I could tell Dad was grinning on the other side of the phone.

I let out a sigh, and told him,

"No. I don't have a girlfriend."

"Reallyy~?"

"I said I don't."

Why am I talking about this with my Dad?

"..Besides, how could I possibly have a girlfriend when I don't even have any friends...?"

"Hm? What'd ya say?"

"Nothing. See ya——"

Later, is how I was going to end that sentence, but I thought of something.

"Oh yeah, apparently Kobato's got a boyfriend. She's spending the night at his place today too."

"The hell'd you just say!? What little shit thinks that he can lay his goddamn hands on my little angel!? I'm coming back to Japan right now!"

He yelled in a voice so loud it made my head hurt.

Dad's always doted on Kobato like that.

"...Just kidding. See ya later."

"Wha——"

Ca-lick.

I hung up the phone.

...And that was how my phone call with Dad ended.

The Amusement Park ~Invitation Chapter~

"Kobato-chan is hereeeee!!"

It was the fourth day of our break after finals.

Just as Kobato and I entered the clubroom as usual, Sena yelled all of a sudden, jumping up off the couch.

"!"

Kobato's face stiffened in an instant before quickly hiding behind me.

Sena had a creepy smile on her face, and she went, "Hehehe~" as she slithered her way up to us.

"Hehehe, Kobato-chan you're as cute as ever! That dress really does look good on you, Kobato-chan~"

Kobato was wearing a frilly black dress.

She'd been wearing normal clothes up until a while ago due to the heat, but she switched back to this outfit now that it was cooler outside.

"Uuu~ An-chan..."

Kobato pleaded to me in a scared voice as she grabbed the edge of my sleeve.

Sena seems to really like Kobato, and she always tries to find ways to get closer to her, but Kobato isn't good with people she's not really familiar with, so she has a strong dislike of Sena.

Although, even if she was good with strangers and stuff, I'm pretty sure she'd still think Sena's creepy considering how Sena always tries to talk to her.

"Gyuhehe, hey~ hey~ Kobato-chan♥"

...Sena seems even creepier than usual today. I wonder why.

"Just what the heck do you want?"

I asked as I stepped in front of Kobato to cover her from Sena.

As I did, Sena pulled out a ticket from her pocket, and said,

"Kobato-chwan! Want to go to the amusement park with me tomorrow!?"

"No!"

Kobato popped out from behind my back for a second to deliver her refusal.

However, Sena didn't back down, and said in an even creepier voice than before,

"Ohh~ Come on, don't say that~♥ Here, look, this ticket is for ' Yokoshima Wonderland'! You know about Yokoshima Wonderland too, right Kobato-chan? I got these from one of Papa's friends at work!"

"Oh...? Yokoshima huh?"

"Yokoshima Wonderland" is a big amusement park in the next prefecture over.

It has a huge hot spring resort in addition to the amusement park (actually the amusement park was added on to the hot springs), and tons of people from all over go to it. It's one of the best places to vacation at around here.

Dad took Kobato and I there when we were in grade school, and I remember it being a lot of fun. Kobato (this was before her evil eye appeared) had a lot of fun running around the place too.

Sena was holding a ticket that got you an entry pass to the amusement park itself, plus a free pass for all the rides for one day.

"...It's Yokoshima, Kobato. Why don't you take her up on her offer and go have fun?"

"Ehhh..."

I said, causing Kobato to frown.

So she hates Sena that much, huh...

"Wait, look Kobato-chan, I've got this too!"

Sena took another thing out of her pocket. It looks like it's a flier this time.

"They're holding a show for your favorite anime 'Kurogane no Necromancer' right now!"

The flier had "Kurogane no Necromancer Costume Show Now Open!" in big letters written across it.

"...Hmph... I have no interest in a mere imitation such as that..."

Kobato said in an unhappy voice.

But, yeah, I can see why a middle schooler wouldn't care for a costume show.

"...There was just some random old guy inside... There was some stupid old guy inside Red Ranger..."

I guess that time she saw the people getting into the costumes back when she was little is like a trauma for her now.

Although, we'll save that story for another time.

Sena didn't give up though, and pressed Kobato even further.

"Come on, don't say that~ Look, they're even selling limited edition stuff! I'll buy you any of it, Kobato-chan! I'll buy you candy and juice too, and then later at night why don't we eat dinner at a nice restaurant on the top floor of some hotel!? I'll get you a super

tasty hamburger! So, how about it, Kobato-chan!? Come have a fun night with your big sister Sena, haa haa..."

That face of hers and the way she was talking made her look just like some pervert going after a grade schooler on the way home. In fact, if I didn't know her I would've called the cops on her right there and then.

"...Limited edition... Candy... Hamburger..."

Kobato swallowed her saliva so loud you could hear it. Hey, don't let someone tempt you with that crap.

"Kufufu... Come on Kobato-chan, there's nothing to be afraid of. .. It'll be lots of fun... I'll be gentle too... Uhe, if you want, I could give you some spending money too, hehehe... So come with your big sister Sena, OK?"

Sena was waving the ticket and flier back and forth in front of Kobato.

But, that was when someone ripped the ticket out of Sena's hand from behind.

"...Just how pathetic are you?"

「小鳩ちゃん、私の妹になってくれないかしら」

「……どこまで残念なのだ貴様は」

The person who took the ticket was a boyish looking girl with silky short hair that suited her quite well—— Yozora Mikadzuki.

By the way, aside from Kobato, Sena, and I, the rest of the members of the Neighbors Club were in here too.

"Hey, give that back to me, stupid Yozora!"

Yozora ignored Sena and her protests, staring at the ticket so hard you could call it glaring.

"Hmph... Yokoshima Wonderland, huh..."

"Have you gone there before, Yozora?"

"...I have."

I didn't ask for any real reason, but Yozora seemed upset as she answered.

I thought that was strange, and then continued by saying,

"Well, I guess even you can handle an amusement park."

"...!"

Yozora's face twisted with hatred, but only for an instant.

"Y-Yozora?"

I was surprised, but Yozora simply returned her face to its default sullen expression, and said,

"It wasn't with my family. I went with a classmate."

"A classmate!? Seriously!?"

"Yes."

"...You're not gonna tell me it was with Tomo-chan, are you?"

"No. I went with one of my real classmates."

Yozora said, still seeming upset.

"...I went the fall of my second year in middle school... I spent the whole time reading a book in the cafe area..."

Looks like I accidentally just dug up a sad part of her past.

Alone at an amusement park... It hurts just imagining it.

"I've never gone with anyone but my family, myself. It'd be nice if I could go with some friends one day."

"Yes, it would..." Yozora said along with a tiny sigh.

Then,

"OK! Let's all go to Yokoshima Wonderland tomorrow!"

"Seriously!?"

I was taken aback by Yozora's sudden suggestion.

"It's not like you're doing anything tomorrow anyway, right Kodaka?"

"...Well, yeah, I'm not, but..."

By the way, tomorrow's also the last day of our break.

We didn't have any homework to do before it was over, and I didn't have even the tiniest plans to go out.

"An amusement park, huh? Rika always wanted to go check it out once too. Tomorrow's a weekday, and there probably won't be many people there too. I'd love to go."

Rika said in a slightly excited tone of voice.

"I shall accompany Aniki no matter where he wishes to go."

Yukimura said in his usual calm voice.

"An amusement park!? An amusement park! An amusement park, yayyy! Uohhh! I'm going to an amusement park! I'm going to an amusement park with Onii-chan! I'm going to Yokoshima, ahahaha!!"

Maria let out a shout of joy.

Kobato saw Maria get excited, which led even her to saying,

"H-hmph... I suppose I should amuse myself with the games of you humans once in a while..."

"OK, we're all set then," said Yozora.

But, right as Yozora said that, Sena raised her voice.

"H-hold it! I only invited Kobato-chan! Why are all of you coming too!?"

"This ticket is for six people. You might as well use it."

"Eh, it is?"

"Yeah."

Yozora handed me the ticket.

"Huh, it really is for six people."

It certainly did have "Can be used to claim up to six adult fare tickets." written on it.

"J-just because you *can* use it for six people doesn't mean you have to! I want to go alone with Kobato-chan!"

"That'd just be a waste... Besides, Kobato said she doesn't want to go alone with you."

I said, to which Kobato quickly nodded her head up and down at.

Sena let out a "Kh..." and said,

"Fine... I'll let you commoners come along this time. You better be grateful!"

"Yeah yeah, thanks Meat."

Yozora said in a monotone voice.

Just after that, something hit me.

"...Huh? Six people...?"

Yozora, Sena, Yukimura, Rika, Kobato, Maria, and me. There are seven neighbors club members.

"Technically it says 'six adult fare tickets'."

"I'm pretty sure Yokoshima charges adult fare for everyone in middle school and older," said Sena. All of our eyes naturally led to one person.

"....." "....." "....." "....." "....." "....."

"...Fueh?"

Maria (age 10) tilted her head in confusion as we all stared at her.

"Fuehhh!?"

She let out a shriek after she'd figured out why we were staring.

".....Hey... Can I not go to the amusement park?"

Maria asked with a face that looked like the world was about to end.

"...That's what it looks like," Yozora said, devoid of emotion.

"...Because I'm a kid?"

"...Because you're a kid."

"...I see..."

Maria said with a dead look in her eyes.

"...It's because I'm a kid... I see..... I hope you all enjoy the amusement park. I'm just a little kid after all... Don't worry about this little kid here... I'm used to this kind of stuff..."

It hurt just looking at Maria, who looked like she just lost her soul.

I guess I can pay for Maria's ticket... Right as I was about to say that,

"Fine fine, I'll pay for one kid's ticket too."

Sena beat me to it.

"Sena!?"

I stared at Sena, surprised by her actually offering to help. She then said, with her cheeks dyed red,

"Like I could just leave one little kid out of all of us having fun. We're all using my ticket anyway, I might as well cover everyone's. "

"...Wow, you really are good person, aren't you..."

Sena's face went even redder after hearing me compliment her.

"So, I can go to the amusement park?"

Maria said with her head tilted to the side.

"Yeah, Sena's gonna pay for you."

"Yayyyyyyyy!!"

Maria let out a yell full of joy with a big smile on her face.

"Aha! Thanks Sena! You're a good person after all!"

"It's no big deal. It's a noble's duty to provide for the poor."

Sena said, seemingly a little embarrassed.

"...There was no need to... We should have just left that abominable pawn of the church behind..."

Kobato murmured, but the corners of her mouth lifted up into a smile of relief showed how she really felt.

"Yay, amusement park! I'm going to the amusement park! Ahahahaha! Thanks Sena!"

Maria hugged Sena.

"Hmph, that's right, worship me all you like."

Sena said with a slightly awkward look on her face, to which Maria nodded, and said,

"OK! I'll worship you! Hey~ hey~ Sena, I can even call you ' Onee-chan' instead of that vampire if you want!"

"Eh? No way."

Sena refused Maria's offer, not to hide any embarrassment, but purely because she didn't want her to.

".....Oh, okay."

Maria made a (´･`) face as she let go of Sena.

...Anyway, it was decided that we'd all go to Yokoshima Wonderland tomorrow.

"Sena."

After the sun had set and we'd left club for the day, I called out to Sena in front of the school entrance.

"Hm?"

Sena turned around to me.

"Umm..."

I was thinking I'd ask her about that thing Dad told me on the phone yesterday... That is to say, about Sena and I getting m-married, but...

This is bad... I have no idea how to start this conversation.

Hey, are we getting married?

...Way too blunt.

We're not getting married, right?

...That'd make me look like I was insane if she didn't know what I was talking about.

"?"

Sena tilted her head as she played with her blond hair dancing in the autumn wind.

She looked incredibly beautiful standing there. The fact that she was acting so creepy earlier today was so different than her appearance now that my heart skipped a beat.

"What is it?"

Sena made a puzzled expression on her face.

"Ah, um..."

...There doesn't seem to be anything strange about her... No, I mean, she's always weird, but, how to put it, she doesn't have that kind of love comedy-like embarrassment or anything going on.

"Um, it's like... D-did anything weird happen yesterday?"

"Anything weird?"

"...Umm... Like how the chairman was acting."

"How Papa was acting?"

Sena tilted her head in confusion, and said,

"Ahh, now that you mention it,"

"! Did something happen?"

"Hmm, Papa drank some alcohol after dinner last night. I wouldn't say that's enough to call it weird, but he usually doesn't drink after dinner."

"Alcohol..."

I wonder if he just got drunk and let the alcohol do the talking for him after all.

"Oh right. He gave me the ticket to the amusement park after dinner, and it felt like he was really happy after that for some reason."

"Why?"

"Who knows? I don't remember much, I was too busy thinking of inviting Kobato-chan to the amusement park."

"...I see."

Well, if Sena herself doesn't know, then it was probably just him talking nonsense while he was drunk.

"Hehehe~ I can't wait for tomorrow!"

A creepy smile found its way to Sena's face, and Kobato hid behind me.

"Ahn, embarrassed and shy Kobato-chan is C~U~T~E~ too♥ Kobato-chan you're my angel! I want Kobato-chan to be my little sister~~♥ Hey~ hey~ why don't you call me 'Onee-chan'!?"

"No!"

Kobato gave her usual immediate refusal.

"That 'No!' is so C~U~T~E~ too♥! My heart can't take it!"

"Uuu~..."

"...Sheesh, don't try to steal someone's little sister right in front of them."

I sighed, amazed at how creepy Sena could be, and then said,

"Anyway, see you tomorrow, alright?"

"Yeah! I can't wait!"

Sena nodded with a huge smile on her face.

She's so cute when she smiles too, if only she weren't so pathetic ...

The Amusement Park ~Black Dragon Chapter~

And so, we reached the next, and final, day of our break.

We'd all arrived at Yokoshima Wonderland.

We met up earlier, at eight in the morning, at Tohya Station, rode the train for an hour, got off at the nearest stop, and rode the bus here for about 20 minutes.

It took about two hours, if all the waiting time for the bus and train for us to arrive at the amusement park was included.

Unlike Tohya's public sports center "Ryuuguu Land", this amusement park was the biggest in the whole area, and had a lively atmosphere full of families, young couples, and all kinds of other people because of that.

We all lined up to get in, leaving the actual buying of the tickets to Sena.

"Uohhhhh!? This is an amusement park!? Really really!? Uohh!? "

Screamed Maria, who'd been acting hyper ever since we all gathered up, at the festive entrance banner with sparkling eyes.

Maria had a white one piece on instead of her usual sister uniform, and had a cross hanging down from her neck as well. Seeing her silver hair rock back and forth as she innocently jumped all over the place was just like looking at a fairy.

"Oh yeah, hey Maria, have you ever been to an amusement park ?"

"Nope! I lived a gloomy youth of studying alone in my room ever since I was little!"

"No, um, your youth hasn't ended yet. In fact, it's barely even started."

"Really!? Ahaha, my youth's barely even started! Ohhh!"

"...If you don't shut up I'll end that life of yours right here and now."

Yozora said with a look of displeasure to Maria, who was even louder than usual.

Yozora and Rika already looked like they were about to pass out after having to ride on the train at the same time as everyone commuting to school and work.

Yukimura was in his default spaced out mode, lacking any expression. He was wearing his usual maid uniform, and was attracting a ridiculous amount of attention from everyone around us like he always did.

Kobato looked really excited about the amusement park up until we all met up this morning, but was now looking upset after having Sena all over her for the duration of both the train and bus rides.

"Ahh~... Rika wants to go home now. Who cares about an amusement park."

Rika said with a tired look on her face as she wobbled her way around.

"Ahaha, Rika what are you saying!? Why would you go home already? You're really dumb~!"

"...*Twitch*"

Rika put a slight look of anger on her face in response to Maria's innocent laugh.

By the way, Rika was wearing her lab coat on top of her uniform as usual, but she wasn't wearing her glasses that were like her trademark up until a short while ago, and her hair was styled into a side tail.

"Ahaha! Hey~ Hey~ Onii-chan, what's that what's that!?"

Maria was pointing at a Ferris wheel we could see from the entrance.

"Oh, that's——"

"That's a giant version of an execution device used back in Mediaeval Europe. It's made to trample the victim, which is accomplished by attaching them to the outside of a giant wheel and then letting it spin, filling them with terror... The instant the

wheel is about to make a full rotation you hear a ——**SPLAT**—— sound as the body is crushed as flat as a senbei cracker, signaling the end of the execution."

Yozora interrupted me, and told Maria another stupid lie in a very real-sounding serious voice.

"Eh..."

The smile on Maria's face disappeared after hearing Yozora's lie.

"Eh... W-w-w-w-w-why is that in an amusement park!? I know amusement parks are for fun!"

"Oh, that. That's false information."

"Ehhh!?"

Then Rika joined in with Yozora.

"An amusement park is actually a way to quietly dispose of bad kids who don't do what they're told. People saying it's a fun place is just propaganda so that the bad kids won't resist when they're getting taken there."

"Khhh, t-that old hag tricked me!"

"Hmph, it's your own fault for getting tricked."

"T-that's not fair—— Adults aren't fair! Using propaganda isn't something you should do!"

"That's right, adults aren't fair. Looks like you've learned something new today, Ms. Maria."

"Although, getting smarter now isn't going to help you... Kukuku..."

"You have a point there, Ku Ku Ku..."

...You two sure work well together.

Maria's eyes went wide after seeing the evil smiles on Yozora's and Rika's faces.

"Y-you mean you took me to this amusement park because...!"

"Kukuku... You fell for their propaganda magnificently like the fool you are, foolish pawn of God... Your entrails will be spilled upon this land, and offered as a sacrifice to the God of Darkness, Asmodeus..."

Even Kobato was joining those two now.

"Uuuu~ Save me Onii-chan..."

Maria started getting teary-eyed as the three of them ganged up on her.

"Kukuku... Seeking assistance from my clansman is futile...!"

"O-Onii-chan is a good guy!"

"Imbecile... Just look at Kodaka's face... It's obvious he's a bad guy."

"Shut it!"

I retorted to Yozora who'd started insulting me.

"Y-you're wrong! Onii-chan might look like a bad guy, but his heart is pure! Right, Onii-chan!?"

Maria looked at me with eyes full of hope.

"....."

...I see... I look like a bad guy even in Maria's untainted eyes...

Having Maria say that to me when I know she doesn't mean anything bad by it only makes it hurt that much more...

"Kukuku... The gate to purgatory has already been opened... Your life has but a short while left..."

"U-Uuuu~..."

It was right that instant.

We all heard a loud "Kyaaaahhhhhh!" along with a loud rumbling sound.

"Gyaaahhhhhhh!?"

Maria screamed with a terrified look on her face.

It was just the people riding the roller coaster who screamed, but I'm guessing Maria thought it was the death cries of children being executed.

"Kukuku... That just now was from an execution device known as a roller coaster in which you suffer intense pain by being dragged through the sky at high speeds. Those who ride it spend their final moments unable to do anything but cry and scream."

"Gyahhhhhh!"

"Maria, we'll show you at least some compassion. You may choose whether you wish to be executed on the Ferris wheel or the roller coaster."

"Gyahhhhhh!"

"Kukuku, it's your turn next..."

"Gyahhhhhh! Gyahhhhhh!! Gyahhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

"Shut up, what are you yelling for?"

It was Sena who came up behind Maria and lightly tapped her head.

"Ah, thanks for getting the tickets."

"Here commoners, your entry tickets and free passes. You better be thankful for them. This one's your kid's ticket Maria."

"Gyahhhhhh!"

Maria let out a scream and ran away as Sena went to give her the ticket.

"...What's with her?"

Sena tilted her head in confusion.

I sighed, and explained to Maria that Yozora and Rika were lying, and that an amusement park was actually a fun place.

"Ghhh... y-you tricked me! That's dirty! Adults are dirty! You're as dirty as poop!"

"Hurry up or we'll leave you behind little girl."

"Kukuku... You may as well go and get lost in here..."

Yozora and the rest all went to grab their tickets and free passes from Sena while looking at Maria, who was still mad, out of the corner of their eyes.

"Ugahhhh! You people! You're such poop! You're total poop!"

I walked through the amusement park gates with Maria, who was chasing Yozora and the rest as she yelled at them.

"Uohhhh! Uohhhh! Yahooo!!"

Maria was in a good mood again after a few steps past the front gates.

It was really packed trying to get in, but was actually pretty spacious once you got in. In fact, it looked like you could run all over the place without any problem.

There was a merry-go-round, roller coaster, and pirate ship ride nearby, and none of them had a particularly long line.

Maria wasn't the only one getting excited either.

"S-so this is the legendary amusement park...! Wow..."

Rika, who'd escaped the crowd of people and recovered her stamina, opened her eyes wide and started twitching her nose.

"Aha, so that's what you'd call a merry-go-round!? This is the first time I've seen one so close up! There really are horses spinning around it! So c~u~t~e~♥!"

That innocent smile on her face was so cute I might've actually fallen for her if she wasn't Rika.

隣人部遊園地にて

"Although, Rika *does* have a sex toy version of a merry-go-round in her room!"

...That seriously creeped me out.

"Huh... so this is an amusement park..."

Sena said as she looked all around us, brimming with curiosity.

"Eh, Sena have you never been to an amusement park before?"

Sena started to blush after I asked her, and she replied with,

"S-so what if I haven't? Papa's always busy with work, and it didn't look like it'd be much fun anyway..."

"Hmph... How very ignorant of you to have never even gone to an amusement park before, Meat."

"I don't want to hear that from someone who came and spent the whole time reading alone!"

Sena yelled at Yozora and her criticism.

"We came all the way out here to have fun, can you two give it a rest for once...?"

I said, tired of them always having to fight over every little thing.

"Mu... You're right. Kobato-chan, go have tons of fun today, ok? With me of course!"

"...No."

Kobato wore a look of utter disgust as she hid behind my back.

"Alright then, let's get a move on. What should we ride first?"

I asked everyone, and was greeted with an instant reply.

"""""The Black Dragon!!""""" "

Yozora, Sena, Rika, and Kobato all yelled the same answer at me.

Their eyes seemed to have a bit of a sparkle in them.

"S-seriously...?"

I couldn't stop myself from cringing a little.

"The Black Dragon".

That was the name of Yokoshima Wonderland's main attraction, the largest roller coaster in the entire world.

It went up to 150 km/h, had a max height of over 100 meters, and the whole thing was roughly 2,500 meters long.

The rails, pillars, and everything else were painted jet black, and had the same kind of intimidating feel to it that a real black dragon would have.

It was set up all the way at the very back of the park, but you could see it clearly even from where we were.

"Y-you want to go for The Black Dragon right away? Seriously? Are you insane!?"

"I told myself I was gonna ride it no matter what when Papa gave me the tickets~"

Sena sounded happy about it.

"I was researching this park last night, and the more I looked at The Black Dragon's specs, the more I was fascinated by it. I want to ride it as soon as possible."

Rika said, while breathing wildly through her nose.

"I-It's not like I stayed up all night staring at the homepage worrying about which thing to ride, ok? I just figured we should ride it since it's so popular."

Yozora started spitting out an excuse all of a sudden. I wonder if she was embarrassed about doing the same thing as Rika.

"This is my revenge for getting stuck at the height check before... Kukuku... Subduing a black dragon with my power of the Exalted Night is but a simple task..."

Kobato said with her usual chuckle.

"I don't really get it, but the name sounds cool! I want to ride that black dragon thing too!"

"The Black Dragon... A black dragon... Truly a fitting name for a true man."

Looks like even Maria and Yukimura want to ride it now.

Doesn't look like there's any way to avoid it now...

"F-fine, we'll ride it later, but let's warm-up on something easier first..."

I tried to buy some time for now.

"I don't need any warm-up."

Sena said, bursting at the seams with confidence.

Seriously, she's never even been to an amusement park before. Just where does she get that confidence of hers from... No, wait, maybe it's because she's never been on one before so she can't imagine how scary it is.

"Hehe, Kodaka-senpai, are you..."

Rika showed me a teasing smile.

"Uu..."

I gulped, causing a sadistic smile to rise to Yozora's face as she said,

"Kodaka, you're scared of riding The Black Dragon, aren't you?"

"...Kh, yeah! That's right! So what if I'm scared!? That thing wasn't made for humans to ride in!"

It was frustrating, but I admitted she was right.

The truth is, I rode it once before when I came here with Dad and Kobato. (By the way, Dad really likes these thrill rides, despite his age).

Unlike Dad, I'm not very good with thrill rides, but that doesn't mean I can't enjoy a normal roller coaster or pirate ship ride.

But The Black Dragon... that thing's on a whole different level.

To start, you go up the first hill—— Right after the ride starts you can hear the click clack of the carts as you slowly ascend farther and farther from the ground.

You keep going up, even past the top of the Ferris Wheel nearby , causing your fear to grow faster and faster.

And then, once your fear has hit its peak—— You fall.—— You don't ride the coaster down, you literally fall!

The slow pace you'd been going at up until then quickly reaches the ride's maximum speed as you take a nose dive.

My heart felt like it was going to jump out of my chest by the time I'd reached that point, but the nightmare doesn't end here. There are more nose dives, loops, and corkscrews that you race through at insane speeds while passing right by the ground and the ride's support pillars. It's a hell so intense you think you're really going to die as you loop through it again and again without a pause.

I swore to myself I'd never ride that thing again after those three minutes of torture that seemed like an eternity.

My body is shaking from just remembering it...

"No offense, but... that thing is like the amusement park's last boss. It's not something people like you who only just came here to play could handle."

"That just makes me want to ride it even more! I'll be ok, it's no problem! I'm a goddess after all. I'm like an invincible hero whose stats are capped right from the start."

"Rika likes to do low level clears of RPG's. Also Rika's an M."

Kh, I shouldn't have said it that way...!

Still, Sena's game obsession aside, how am I supposed to convince our masochist, Rika?

I was worried, but persevered in trying to convince them all to stop.

"I'm not kidding, this thing isn't a game. I've ridden it once before, but that was enough to scare the crap out of me. You'll know what I mean if you ride it, but you'll wish you hadn't...! This isn't like any other ride you've ever seen... The guy who made this thing had to be insane."

"I see... So it's that scary, huh..."

Yozora murmured with a meek look on her face.

"Guess we can't do anything about it if it's that scary..."

"S-so you see what I mean now?"

"Yeah. Kodaka, if you're that scared of it, then——"

"That's all the more reason we have to ride it. With you of course," said Sena.

"I simply must ride it now. With Kodaka-senpai of course," said Rika.

"Indeed," said Yozora, with a satisfied nod.

"What are you three, demons!?"

I yelled, straining my voice, but the trio of demons simply grinned at me.

"Ahaha, you're so lame. You say it's so scary, but a roller coaster is still basically just a toy, right? It's not like anyone's gonna die on it."

"Rika likes that cute scaredy-cat side of Kodaka-senpai herself."

"I want to see~ Kodaka scream and cry~ ♪"

Sena and Rika both insulted me in turns, and Yozora followed up with some weird song.

Kh, these three...

"Fine fine, I got it! Let's go ride The Black Dragon then...! Don't come crying to me later, got it!?"

I said, finally giving in to their taunting, before Sena said with a face full of confidence,

"Heh heh, as if *I* would ever cry!"

"...Are you kidding me?"

Yozora said with a look of disdain in her eyes.

And so, we all ended up challenging the last boss right away, despite how bad of an idea it was...

"

GYAAAHHHHH

–

HHHHHHHHHH

"

I died.

Normally, you'd have to wait one or two hours to ride The Black Dragon on a holiday, but we got in after about 10 minutes due to it being a weekday morning.

For better or worse, our group got the front car with Yozora and Sena in the front (each cart seats two people per row), followed by Kobato and Maria, Rika and I, and Yukimura alone in the back.

The members of the Neighbors Club then had a taste of the same fear I'd experienced once before.

"Hmph, this is nothing. It could stand to go faster."

"Hehehe, the commoners below me look like the ants they are. I knew being up high would feel good!"

"These vibrations are just right—— Ahn! Rika is starting to get horny."

"Kukuku... What is the matter, Dragon of Darkness... Is this all you've got? Kukuku..."

...Yozora and the rest were all acting like that when we started, but they all started talking less as we got higher, and they eventually switched to screams once we got about as high as the Ferris Wheel.

"T-t-t-t-the guy who thought this up had to have been a nutjob! God damn it, die! Go die you crazy pervert sadist psycho asshole!

Stop it! Cut it out! Take me back! I'm gonna kill you! I'll kill you I'll kill you I'll kill you! No no no, stop stop, seriously please stop! Die die die, I'm going to dieee!! Shit, Meat Meat Meat, stupid Meat, I hate you Meat! This is all your fault! Why did you have to bring those tickets!? It's all your fault! My life is not going well, ****** (I couldn't really hear this part) never paying attention to me, everything is all your fault! I'll fucking kill you, I'll so fucking kill you, you ground beef minced meat hot dog ham sausage! Die die die

happens to the rest of them, just save me Goodddddddddd! I'm falling, I'm falling, ngah! K-Kodaka, Kodaka Kodaka Kodaka Kodakaaaaaaaaaaaa! (Sena)"

_____

"Gyaaahhhhh! You did lie to me, didn't you Yozora!? I-I'm going to die here for sure, you damn rotten oranges! Gyahhhh! Poop! Poop! Poop poop poop poop poop poop poop poop poop poop poop poop poop poop poop poop poop poop poop poop ! Haeehhhhh!? Uohhhhh!? Nowaaahhhhh!? Aha, ahaha, ahahahaha! ! Ahahaha, so high so high so high! AhahahahahahahahahahaGYAHHHHHHH! Poops UNIVERRRRRRRRRRSSSSSSEE!! (Maria. Sounds like she's having fun)"

_____

"...Kuku... Kukuku... Come, oh Black Dragon... You shall guide me to the ends of time itself... Kukuku... Kukukuuuuu... Kuku- Uwahhh An-chan, auuuu~~ S-stop yelling poop you stupid nun! Gyaaaahhhh!? A-A-A-A-An-chan, where are you An-chan!? I said shut up already! Where did you go An-chan!? An-chaaaan!! Byaaahhhhhhhhnn! Fgyaaaaaaahhhhhnn! Uwaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh! (Kobato. Bawling.)"

_____

"When Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara was practicing the profound Prajñāpāramitā, he illuminated the Five Skandhas and saw that they are all empty, and he crossed beyond all suffering and difficulty. Śāriputra, form does not differ from emptiness; emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness; emptiness itself is form. So too are feeling, cognition, formation, and consciousness... (Yukimura was talking in his usual calm voice . I think he's probably chanting the Heart Sutra. I wish he'd stop though, since hearing someone chant a sutra behind you is seriously scary)"

_____

"....."

Rika, who was sitting next to me, was the only one who'd been silent and expressionless as we got closer to the top of the first hill.

But, the instant we hit the first, and biggest, drop of 100 meters that spiked down at a 70 degree angle,

Snap.

"!?"

...I think I just heard the sound of something in Rika snapping just now.

".....Fuck."

U-um... Rika...?

I was desperately grabbing on to the bar in front of me as we fell down that terrifying drop, unable to do anything other than scream "UWAAAHHHHHHHH!" like everyone else, let alone actually talk to Rika.

I could hear Rika mumbling something in a calm voice all the while though.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuckkkkkkkkk! God damn gravity you piece of shit...! You don't care who it is as long as you can pull down on them, do you, you little bitch!! Gravity, you piggy bitch slut! Holy fucking shit what a god damn whore you are...! Hah, you're Earth's greedy little slut, you damn bitch in heat! Fuck you universal gravitation, you're just Newtonian Mechanics' dirty little whore! You're just the crusty semen left over in that slutty apple's pussy after that son of a bitch Isaac fucked its rotten juices! Special theory of relativity, you impotent phimosis piece of shit! Einstein, you old limp dick fuck! What, got something to say!? Then move that tiny little twig of yours faster! Cum faster than the speed of light! A pig that can't fly through space-time is just a piece of shit that reeks of semen and can't even last 5 seconds in his wet dreams ! Fucking fucking fucking fucking fucking fucking fucking UNIVERRRRRRRRSSSEE!!"

"Uwahhhh, Rika snappeddd!?"

I have no idea what she's talking about, but Rika was scaring the crap out of me!

That fucking swearing of hers is even scarier than when Yozora yelled at people. She's got little Kodaka shaking over here too! Ah, crap, I started talking like her.

I was already terrified from The Black Dragon's insane drops, speed, and turns, but when you add in Rika yelling all that nonsense with a half-smile on her face, it made everything twice as scary. My heart was done for.

End it! Someone just end this nightmare already...!

All I could do was keep praying that it would end as The Black Dragon swung me around...

The Amusement Park ~Astaroth Chapter~

"Haha... S-see...? .....I told you, didn't I...?"

After those hellish three minutes ended, and we'd finally returned to the ground where we could safely walk on two feet again, we all flopped down onto a bench near The Black Dragon's exit.

"....."

"....."

Yozora and Sena simply sat there as though they didn't even have the energy to answer my question.

Even those two must be regretting how stupid they were to pick that roller coaster of all things as their first one to ride.

"Uu... My head hurts... I can't, I can't remember anything... I feel like I just saw an incredibly scary dream..."

Rika moaned as she held her head in her hands.

"...You really don't remember? You were seriously freaking out when we were still on The Black Dragon. You kept going fuck this and fucking that..."

"T-There's no way Rika would ever say something so vulgar!"

"Uh, no, it wasn't *that* much worse than what you usually say."

Hell, you're acting kinda weird right now.

"...Although, what you were saying was definitely worse than just 'vulgar'..."

"Oh, is that so? I do not have any memory of such events. Rika is, as you can see, a clean, pure, and beautiful maiden. It makes no sense for me to say 'fuck' or 'son of a bitch' or anything similar. That was all the fault of both Newton and Einstein."

"So you do remember it!"

"Ah! Crap!"

...Sheesh, I swear, she's so...

"Ahaha, that roller coaster went so high! That was fun! It went vwoosh, and swoosh, and gagaaa! Also also, the top was all vaswoosh, and it went up so high in the sky! That was so awesome ~ Ahahaha!"

Maria was the only one jumping around in front of me full of energy.

She's fine after riding that thing...? I can't believe it.

"Hey~ Hey~ Onii-chan, wanna ride it again?"

"Ehh!? N-no, I'm good..."

"Ehhh~"

"Go ride with somebody else..."

"Hmmm~"

Maria seemed unsatisfied as she looked over the rest of the club members sitting on the bench.

Yozora and Sena were sitting there, totally out of it.

Yukimura was standing behind me, pale as a ghost, still chanting the Heart Sutra.

There was Kobato, going "Hic... Hic..." as she stared at the ground, trying to hold back her tears.

No way they can do it again...

Rika looked better than the rest of them, but I don't want her riding The Black Dragon again and getting any weirder than she already is.

"Hey Maria, why don't we try the other stuff? Isn't there anything else you want to ride?"

I took out a map of the park, and showed it to Maria.

"Hmmmmmmm~..... All of it!"

She answered, after having thought about it with her arms crossed for a while.

"A-all of it, huh..."

I don't think it'd be impossible to hit every attraction before closing time on an uncrowded day like this, but I've no doubt my body and willpower would give out before that.

There are plenty of other crazy thrill rides besides The Black Dragon.

As I was thinking that, an announcement started playing from the speakers nearby.

"We have an announcement for all of our guests today. Our ' Kurogane no Necromancer' costume show will be starting in the multipurpose stage area at 10:45 a.m. There will be opportunities to shake hands with the characters, and purchase limited edition goods, so please come watch if you have the time."

After hearing the broadcast, Kobato's face jumped up in an instant.

"Gooo~ Baaa~ Dohh~ Jaannn~~♥"

Sena got up, and wobbled her way over to Kobato like some kind of zombie.

Her face was still pale, probably because she hadn't recovered from The Black Dragon yet, and the way only her eyes were shining with energy was incredibly disgusting.

"Ufu, ufu, ubfufufu~ Let's go to the costume show together, ok~ ? I'll buy you aaaanything you want, byufufu..."

"Uuu~...!"

A look of anguish rose to Kobato's face.

She wants the limited edition stuff, but doesn't want to go with Sena... is what her face was saying.

"...We can't let her keep treating us all day, so how about I go too, Kobato?"

I said, causing Kobato's face to light up like a light bulb.

"You mean you'll buy me the limited edition goods!?"

"Well, we did come all the way out here and all. Buying you one or two things wouldn't hurt."

"Yay~! Come on, let's go An-chan!"

Kobato jumped off the bench and started dragging me along.

"H-hold it Kodaka! I'm going with you too!"

"Ehhhh."

Kobato didn't look happy about it, but we couldn't just stop her from coming with us, so we ended up going as a group of three.

Forcing the rest of the club to watch a costume show about an anime they don't care about would be a little awkward, so we decided to meet up again once the show was over.

I left Maria in Yukimura's hands for the time being.

I wasn't sure if he was good or bad with those thrill rides, but I have faith that if anyone can handle her, it's Yukimura. Having faith is important.

Once we got closer to the multipurpose stage, we could hear the theme song of "Kurogane no Necromancer" season three playing. (Technically it has a subtitle that reads "The 3rd Necromancy")

According to what I saw on the web yesterday, "Kurogane no Necromancer" (Fans of the series apparently shorten it to " Kuroneku") is an original TV series that started airing about two years ago. It was pretty popular and got a good reception, so after the first series ended they made a sequel, which also did well, resulting in the creation of the current, third, season.

It was originally a so-called "Magical Girl" anime that was aimed at young girls, but the main characters use the power of darkness as well as control corpses, the story has lots of heavy elements like betrayals and war, the characters are all designed to be cute and likable, and the battle scenes are all pretty detailed. Hence, due to those factors, the audience widened up to middle and high school girls, as well as adult anime fans, and apparently the story's had a heavier atmosphere to it ever since the second season.

There are also lots of similar works that were likely influenced by the show, like the doujin game "Shinku no Elemental Master", which has the same core elements of Kuroneku, with its own original ideas and ero scenes added in. Most hardcore Kuroneku fans say that they're all just rip-offs, but there are some that got popular enough for their own anime.

Kobato's been into this anime ever since she saw season two in 7th grade, and ended up being affected by it so much she started wearing frilly dresses, a color contact in her right eye, and using that exaggerated way of talking.

"Hehehe, aren't you excited~? Kobato-chan~"

"....."

Kobato wore a frown on her face as she completely ignored Sena every time she tried to talk to her.

However, that seemed to make Sena happy too, so no matter how cold Kobato was, Sena only liked her more and more.

The whole reason Sena got interested in Kobato was the aforementioned series "Shinku no Elemental Master", and apparently, on top of looking similar, the way Kobato always ignores her is exactly the way Iris, Sena's favorite character from that game, acts towards others.

I've also heard that there are lots of characters in other games who wear frilly dresses like Kobato's and talk in an exaggerated manner, and that they're usually tsundere characters whose cold attitude is just to hide their affection.

...I know that Kobato's acting like those made-up characters because she wants to, but I still want to tell Sena to stop acting like she really is one.

We reached the multipurpose stage a short while after that.

It wasn't all that big, and barely one fourth of the seats were filled.

It was mostly parents with their kids, most of whom looked to be about five or six.

The show's fans' actual age range should be wider, but I guess this is what you get when you go to a costume show.

Anyway, we picked some seats in the middle a little ways up where we had a good view of the whole stage as we waited for the show to begin.

Sena kept trying to talk to Kobato, even now.

"Kobato-chan, you know, I bought all the 'Kuroneku' blu-rays the other day. I gotta say, it was really interesting!"

"....."

"Hehehe, surprised? I'm actually a pretty hardcore fan of Kuroneku you know~"

"....."

"Hey, Kobato-chan, who's your favorite character? I~ thi~nk for me, it'd be, umm, Meru-chan who shows up in season two. She only showed up for one episode, but she was super cute, and strong, and——"

"**Meriru**."

Kobato cut off Sena, saying just that one word.

"Hwah?"

".....Meriru... She showed up in season two episode eight, and got in Gernica-chan's way. Her full name is 'The Phoenix User' Emeraude Mireille von Livalacia Ootori, and her nickname is Meriru...! It's not Meru...!"

"Ah...!?"

Sena's face went completely stiff.

"O-oh, right! Y-yeah, it's Meriru-chan, that's it! Big sis made a little mistake!"

"...You said she was your favorite too..."

"Gh...!"

Sena winced after having Kobato point that fact out to her in a cold voice.

She was probably trying to make Kobato think she was really into Kuroneku by picking a minor character as her favorite instead of one of the main ones, but... Forgetting her name just made it all backfire.

".....And on top of that, Meriru-chan showed up again in episode five of season three..."

"Hau! T-the blu-rays for that aren't out yet, so I..."

...Oh man, now Kobato knows she doesn't watch the TV broadcasts every week either...

"U-uhh... Umm, yeah, well, let's put that aside! Kuroneku has some really cool battle scenes, doesn't it~!? I get so excited every time I see Gernica-chan use her special attack, 'Hell Blaze Buster'! That's the only scene I always end up rewinding and watching over and over!"

"Hmph..."

One of Kobato's eyebrows moved slightly.

Now that I think about it, Kobato always re-watches that special attack scene too.

"Hell Blaze Buster is so cool~! I love it!"

"".....What about the mode?"

"...Heh?"

"...What's your favorite Hell Blaze Buster Mode?"

"M-Mode...!?"

Kobato started looking at Sena with a look of disgust in her eyes .

"...Hell Blaze Buster has twelve different modes it can activate depending on which familiar is summoned when it's cast..."

"Eh!? ...Ah, o-oh yeah! Ummm~ M-my favorite mode is, umm~..... D... Dragon Mode...?"

"There ain't no such mode...!!"

Kobato said in a voice filled with her anger.

"B-But... Modes...? Eh, w-were those even in the anime!?"

"...It's not fully explained in the main story... *But*, it's written in the official story data book, they're in 'Magical Hyper Battle', and it's common knowledge for any real fan that the modes change throughout the episodes...!"

"Gyoboh!?"

"How impertinent of you to declare yourself a hardcore fan with such pathetic knowledge about Kuroneku, you utter imbecile. ..!"

Kobato spat out her insults and then promptly turned away.

"Ah, o-oh, I know, Kobato-chan――"

I decided to give Sena a warning as she was about to try talking to Kobato again.

"...Sena, she knows just about everything there is to know about Kurogane no Necromancer. If you're not careful with what you say , you're just gonna be pouring oil onto the fire."

Kobato's a hardcore fan who can't stand people who try to act like they know what they're talking about, hence, everything Sena had done so far was only working against her.

"Uu...!?"

Sena seemed intimidated, but still went on, and said,

"A-ahaha, s-still, that's pretty amazing of you Kobato-chan~ You must be pretty smart to know hard words like 'utter imbecile' ~"

She gave up on using Kuroneku and started trying to flatter her instead.

But, Kobato looked just as upset about what Sena just said.

"...'Utter imbecile' is Gernica-chan's master, 'The Iris Witch' Shenhua's catchphrase... How can you not even know one of the main character's catchphrases... you utter imbecile...!"

"Hauah!? Nooooo!"

Looks like Kobato totally hates her now.

It was totally obvious she wasn't interested in Kuroneku itself, and only bought the blu-rays and games so she could get closer to Kobato.

After that, Kobato ignored everything Sena said, and didn't offer even a single word in response.

"Uuuu~... Kodakaaa..."

Sena looked at me with tears in her eyes.

"...Why don't you get to pick from premade choices and make save points in real conversations...?"

"....."

That sublimely pathetic utterance of hers creeped even me out.

Then, all of a sudden, the Kuroneku theme song playing through the stage speakers stopped, and a young girl dressed like a race queen got up on stage.

Looks like the costume show is finally getting started.

"Hey all you good boys and girls out there~! Thank you very much for coming to play at Yokoshima Wonderland today! We've got a wonderful guest here for all of you today! I bet you all know her, don't you? That's right, it's Gernica-chan from 'Kurogane no Necromancer'!!"

"Yayyy~" went the kids in the stands.

But, unfortunately, it felt a little sad due to how few people were here.

"C-come on Kobato-chan, Gernica-chan is here!"

"....."

Kobato was more or less looking over at the stage, but she stayed silent, and still didn't look happy.

The young girl acting as the MC then called out to the audience again.

"Ok everyone, let's all call Gernica-chan together! On my mark, everyone yell 'Gernica-cha~n' as loud as you can, ok! Get ready, here we go~! Oneee, twooo, three!"

"""""""Gernica-chaaaaaaaann!!"""""""

"GERNICA-CHAN!!"

!?

The owner of the voice who'd just yelled louder than everyone else combined, was Sena.

"S-Sena...!?"

I looked over at Sena, dumbfounded, but all she did was go "Eh ? What?" and made a puzzled look on her face.

Just then, eerie music to make things feel more tense started playing from the speakers.

"Eh, what!? What's going on!?"

The young girl on stage started looking all over the place in a hurry.

"Guahahahaha!!"

What rose to the stage along with a big laugh, was a strange person wearing a black robe and horse mask.

"Oh, is that Gernica-chan? She looks pretty different than she did before..."

Smack!

"Ow!!"

Sena smacked my head with the palm of her hand all of a sudden.

"As if that could be Gernica-chan, you idiot. That's obviously a bad guy."

...I was only kidding around...

I don't watch the anime all that closely, but I can at least tell what the main character looks like, sheesh.

The monster standing on the stage then started laughing loudly again.

"Guhahaha, my name is Astaroth the Demon!"

"What's going on!? What did you do to Gernica-chan!?"

"Guhahaha, she'll be a little late after falling into my trap!"

"What!? How could you!? You fiend! You're pure evil!"

The girl was yelling at him pretty strongly, but it kind of fell flat since we didn't know exactly what Astaroth had done.

If all his trap did was make her a little late, did he just slash the tires on her bike or something?

"Guhahaha, I'll take you all as my hostages before Gernica-chan gets here!"

So said Astaroth before quickly reaching out to grab the MC's hand, and then grabbing it gently.

"Kyaaa! Save meee!"

"Guhahaha, one little girl like you is hardly enough! We need more hostages! Now then, are there any of you out there brave enough to be a hostage with this little MC girl up here!? Raise your hand if you are!" yelled Astaroth out at the audience.

However, not a single one of the kids raised their hands.

"Guhahaha, looks like you're all so scared of me you can't raise your hands! However, you may rest easy! I'm not violent with my hostages! Also, I've got special 'Kurogane no Necromancer' prizes for anyone who becomes my hostage!"

"Pretty polite for a kidnapper..."

I quietly retorted, unsure what part of being a hostage includes getting presents.

"Pick me!"

There was someone near me who was apparently lured in by the special prizes.

What an eager little kid~ Hahaha...

"Pick me pick me! I'll be your hostage!"

...Hahaha...

When I said near me, I actually meant sitting right next to me.

In other words, Sena.

"W-what the heck are you doing!?"

"Heh heh, I'm gonna go get that special prize! Just you wait for me, Kobato-chan!"

Sena was all smiles, but Kobato simply looked away as if to say "I have no idea who this person is."

"...I have no need for a special prize from such a shoddy show..."

Murmured Kobato in a tiny voice.

"Guhahaha... No, well, um..."

Astaroth the Demon and the MC girl onstage looked unsure of what to do next.

"...Umm, I think it'd be best if we didn't get any mothers involved..."

"Huh? Mother?"

Sena made a confused face after hearing the girl's words.

"Guhahaha! I can see you must love your daughter very much! But sadly, I'm only interested in children!"

"...What is that horse talking about? Is he a lolicon?"

"He'd be pretty pathetic if that were the case, but somehow I don't think that's what he meant."

Hrmm... I don't really want to admit it, but if my guess is correct...

"Do you think he's mistaking you for Kobato's mom?"

She probably couldn't see Sena very well from the stage, only being able to tell that she was "a young girl with blond hair", so it wouldn't be strange for the MC girl to see Kobato sitting next to her and think that they're mother and daughter.

There was even a young man that looked like her husband, aka me, sitting next to her.

She might be thinking that we're a blond-haired delinquent-ish husband and wife, with a little girl in grade school...

"Haa!? W-why would I be Kobato's mom!? I'm her sister!"

"No, you're not her sister either!"

I quickly yelled back at Sena who just blurted out a huge lie like it was nothing.

"...She's nothin' like Mom."

Kobato quietly murmured to herself with a sullen expression on her face.

"Guhahaha! I'll take the daughter as hostage instead of the mother! Go, my servants! Go and bring me that girl and some other children as well!"

Astaroth gave his order, and about five skeleton mask wearing guys dressed in full black came out from the sides, and went up into the audience's seats.

The little kids were all yelling, some happy and some not.

"...B-besides, if I was Kobato's mom, then that'd mean my h-husband would be Kodaka! That's a terrible joke, I mean, come on..."

Sena said while blushing and fidgeting with her hair.

My face started to get a little warm too.

At the same time, I remembered my phone call with Dad. That whole getting married to Sena thing flashed through my mind.

"I-I don't like it either!"

"Haa!? What do you mean you don't like it!?"

Sena puffed out her cheeks in anger for some reason.

Right as she did, one of Astaroth's skeleton masked servants called out to Kobato.

"Um, excuse me little girl, would you mind coming with me?"

"...Haaa..."

Kobato let out a sigh of displeasure, and stood up.

"Kobato-chan!"

Kobato ignored Sena, who called out to her worryingly.

"Do your best out there, Kobato."

I said, to which Kobato replied, looking back at me over her shoulder,

"Kukuku... But of course..."

She was then escorted by the incredibly gentleman-like skeleton mask man, and brought up to the stage with the rest of the little kids.

"Guhahaha! You've done well to come to me, young ones! I'll have you all be my hostages!"

Kobato and the other kids all lined up on stage, and aside from Kobato, the rest of the kids looked like they were in preschool or just starting grade school.

Kobato was actually the tallest one there, for once.

"Guhahaha! I think I'll have you all introduce yourselves first! MC girl, hand me your mic!"

The MC girl handed Astaroth the mic, and he then pointed it at Kobato.

"Guhahaha! What might your name be, little girl!?"

"...Leysis."

Kobato answered with an irritated look on her face.

"Guhahaha, Leysis-chan is it? Does that mean you came from overseas?"

"...Kukuku... My name is Leysis vi Felicity Sumeragi... I am the Queen of the Exalted Night that has lived for ten thousand years..."

Sheesh, she's acting out that made-up character, even on stage like that?

Mr. Astaroth the Demon seemed lost for words.

"Guhahaha... U-umm, so Leysis-chan, how old are you?"

"How foolish... Did you not hear me...? I do believe I said I have lived for ten thousand years..."

"Guhaha, well isn't that something! Ok, let's move on to you over h——"

"Halt."

Kobato interrupted Astaroth as he tried to quickly move to the next kid after realizing Kobato was going to be a handful.

"There is a question I have for you as well..."

"Guhahaha... A-and what might that be, Leysis-chan?"

"...Astaroth the Demon should have been annihilated by the Holy Knight Carol... How did you manage to come here..."

"Guhahaha! Isn't it obvious? I was revived with the power of darkness!"

Astaroth smoothly dodged the issue.

Or so I thought, but Kobato continued.

"...Kukuku... That would be impossible... It was written in the official story data book that any clansman of the darkness whose core has been broken by Holy Knight Carol's Divine Saber is completely destroyed, unable to revive ever again..."

"Uu... O-official...?"

"You... You are not the true Astaroth, are you...?"

"U-umm... Guhahaha! You've done well to see through my disguise! You're exactly right, I am actually Astaroth's long lost twin brother! I've come from the world of demons to take revenge on Gernica!"

Ohh, not bad.

That was clearly an ad-lib, but the guy in the Astaroth costume really gave it his all.

"Ok, now then, onto the next o——"

"Wait."

"I-is there still something on your mind? Guhaha!"

"Kukuku... The picture of Gernica drawn on the costume show's pamphlet shows her in her costume from season three... However, in episode four of season two, The Abyss Gate was shut. Thus, monster enemies like Astaroth, the main antagonist from season one, stopped appearing after that... Director Kaidou even confirmed in last month's issue of 'Animajor' that there would be no demon enemies in season three... So why would a show about season three have a demon as the enemy...? Also, Carol was the one who defeated Astaroth. Why do you want revenge on Gernica instead of her...?"

"Ehhh..."

Astaroth let out a voice that was the epitome of having no clue what to do next... Then, after about ten or so seconds of silence,

"W-we adults have our reasons, guhahaha!"

Ah, he gave up on playing along with her.

"....."

Astaroth awkwardly(?) averted his eyes from Kobato, who was staring at him with a look of disdain, and said,

"O-ok, time to question the next one! Guhahaha!"

...After that exchange, even the other kids were going "Hey~ hey~ Why is Astaroth here? Didn't he die?" and "What are adult reasons~?" and such. The show started to fall apart, but somehow the cast managed to move it along.

After Astaroth handed out the prizes to his hostages, Gernica-chan finally showed up (in a costume that was pretty deformed, to the point that it barely resembled the anime's detailed design). She saved all the children, and then used her special attack at the end of a long battle with Astaroth, causing him to explode.

Kobato, who'd come back to our seats after watching that, look unsatisfied as she said, "Hell Blaze Buster doesn't make enemies explode..."

You could go up and shake hands with Gernica-chan after the show was over, but Kobato, Sena, and I paid it no attention, and instead headed to the spot where they were selling stuff.

The limited edition goods we heard about turned out to be pretty shabby. They had postcards with characters from the anime on them that had the Yokoshima Wonderland logo on the bottom, stuffed animal versions of the show's mascot character holding a Yokoshima flag, and other similar stuff.

Kobato left the area shortly after, saying, "I don't need any of this junk..."

I tried to cheer Kobato up as we walked towards the spot we all promised to meet up at, and along the way I decided to ask her,

"Hey Kobato, what'd you end up getting from that horse anyway?"

The "special prize" all the hostages got was square-shaped, with sides about 20 centimeters long.

"...Hmph... I doubt it is anything of merit..."

Kobato said, tearing away at the wrapping paper.

What lay under it was a single sheet of colored paper, with someone's name and a drawing of Gernica-chan's face so bad you couldn't call it good no matter how hard you tried on it.

"Wow, what a piece of crap!"

Sena gave her honest impression of it after taking a peek, but then looked like she regret it, and said,

"I'm sorry, Kobato-chan... All you got was that piece of garbage... If only I would've done more research about the show..."

"Moronnnnnn!"

Kobato screamed all of a sudden.

She then said, trembling as she stared at the colored paper,

"T-this is an illustration made and signed by the 'Creative God' of Kuroneku, Director Masashi Kaidou...!"

"Eh, seriously? Doesn't that mean this thing is pretty valuable?"

Kobato rapidly nodded her head up and down.

"I-it's way more than just 'pretty valuable'! This is a priceless treasure!"

"Oh...? But that drawing is pretty bad, and that looks more like normal handwriting than an actual signature, don't you think?"

"I've seen it in a magazine before... Kukuku... This kind of rough drawing is just like Director Kaidou... Kukuku... And that incredibly plain signature is simply yet another part of the Creative God's style..."

"Is that so... Well, good for you, Kobato."

I lightly patted Kobato on the head, causing her to go "Yeah!" and nod at me with a big smile on her face as she lovingly hugged the colored paper.

"You know, now that I think about it, you only managed to get that because Sena raised her hand before, right?"

"Uu..."

"Eh!?"

Kobato groaned, full of displeasure, and Sena's face lit up like a light bulb.

"A-auu..."

Kobato started to blush, and kept taking peeks at Sena.

"Hehehe, what is it, Kobato-chan~♥"

Sena was grinning from ear to ear, waiting for Kobato to say something.

"A... Au... T... Thank... you..."

Kobato murmured, her mouth looking as though she'd just eaten something really sour.

"Eh, what was that, Kobato-chan?"

"N-nothing, you moronnnn!"

Kobato yelled, with her face scrunched up, before running away from us.

"Ahhh, embarrassed Kobato-chan is so c~u~t~e~♥"

I then told Sena, who had a creepy smile on her face,

"I guess I owe you some thanks as well. So, thanks."

After I did, Sena's face went all red for some reason.

"I-it's not like I did it for you! I did it for Kobato-chan! And I mean, what was the deal with that old hag and that horse guy! W-w-w-who are they calling married!? Just remembering it pisses me off!"

"They never said we were married..."

"What was that!?"

"...Nothing at all ma'am."

I said, trying to appease Sena, who'd gotten mad all of a sudden
.

"Seriously, married...? That's so stupid... We have to go out together first..."

"? Did you say something?"

I asked Sena, whose mumbling was trailing off, but that just made her puff out her cheeks and turn her face away from me for some reason.

What the heck is up with her...

The Amusement Park ~Vomit Chapter~

It was 11:30 a.m. when we'd all gathered up again and decided to go get some food at one of the restaurants in the park.

Every single place to eat in here was pretty expensive, and I would've rather just made my own lunch, but it would've been a waste of time, since you aren't allowed to bring any food or drinks in with you.

Anyway, Yozora, Maria, and I decided to get curry, Sena wanted yakisoba, Kobato wanted a hamburger patty set, Yukimura picked plain udon, and Rika ordered mabodofu.

"Hey, what'd you guys all ride while we were gone?"

I asked, to which Yozora replied, "...Nothing," with an unhappy look on her face.

"Nothing?"

"I was reading a book on the bench the whole time."

"Again!?"

"...Shut up. I like reading alone."

Yozora said, as though she were pouting a little bit.

If this is how she was gonna end up, I should've done something with her instead...

"Rika rode the merry-go-round about ten times."

I was surprised as to why Rika would do that.

"T-ten times...? Did you like the merry-go-round that much?"

"No. Honestly, it's a little weird. The feeling you get when you ride it isn't anything special, but it slowly builds up, and right as you think to yourself 'Ah, I can cum like this! Here it comes—— I'm about to cum!' the ride ends. Just three more minutes is all I needed..."

"Just what the hell were you trying to accomplish!?"

"Rika was testing to see whether or not she could use it the same way she uses her adult merry-go-round."

T-this girl is so...

"I managed to get pretty close on my last ride... but in the end, I couldn't do it. As a result, Rika is currently quite sexually frustrated. That is to say, I'm incredibly horny."

All I could do was get creeped out by this gigantic pervert.

"Umm, so Maria, what'd you and Yukimura do?"

"I ate hot dogs!"

Maria answered, full of energy.

"Oh? Did Yukimura buy them for you?"

"Yeah!"

Maria nodded, and then added,

"Also, also~ I had popcorn~, and a crepe~, and a hamburger~, and shaved ice~, and takoyaki~, and ice cream too!"

Just how much did she eat, for God's sake?

"...Was it good?"

"Yeah!!"

I couldn't say anything to that big smile on her face.

"I see... Sorry Yukimura, for making you pay for all that..."

"Do not be absurd. It is an honor to be given the task of accompanying your little sister."

Yukimura said, in his normal tone of voice.

A silver haired little girl eating food from all over the park accompanied by a maid—— I wonder if people who saw them thought Maria was a princess or something.

"Little girls and hot dogs certainly make for a sexy combination, don't they?"

"You can be quiet now."

I quickly retorted to Rika without a moment's delay.

We spent the next few moments talking like that, and before long our food was brought to us.

We all ordered a bunch of different stuff, but I'm glad they brought it all out at once.

"Yay~ curry~! Ahaha, the curry looks just like a pile of po——"

"I may have to kill you depending on how you finish that sentence."

"Po... Poerfectly cooked meat and vegetables!"

"...Good."

After that little exchange, Maria and Yozora began eating their curry.

"Ahaha, this curry is so good! It's so weird how good it tastes when it looks like a pile of poop~!"

"...Maria, I'm going to kill you later."

I followed their lead, and scooped some curry into my mouth.

...It didn't taste good or bad; it was just your typical pork curry. I can't believe this cost me 1,000 yen.

"Kodaka-senpai, you're making a scary face."

Said Rika, dumping tabasco sauce onto her mabodofu.

"Ah, sorry, it's nothing... Wait, isn't that a little too much sauce!?"

The mabodofu Rika had ordered already looked like it was on fire the way it came.

Putting tabasco sauce on top of that gives me the chills.

I looked at her, dumbfounded, and before long Rika's forehead broke out into a sweat.

"Hafuuuu~~ Rika loves a good hot and spicy lunch. Did you know, Senpai? Spiciness isn't a taste, it's actually a form of pain. Ah, the double pain of heat and spiciness! Hawah, it's so hot, it hurts, please give me more pain! Gahh Gahh Haa Haa..."

Rika ate her ridiculously spicy mabodofu with a look of ecstasy on her face.

Sena and Kobato, on the other hand, were fully devoted to devouring their yakisoba and hamburger patty respectively.

Yukimura was expressionless even when eating, slurping each noodle one by one.

...Now that I think about it, this is actually the first time all seven of us have gotten together and eaten out at a restaurant like this.

Although we did eat together over summer break at the training camp.

It kinda feels like we're a group of friends who stopped by a fast food joint or something on the way home from school.

"What is it, Kodaka? That grin of yours is disgusting."

Yozora said, looking at me with one eye half-open.

"I-it's nothing. Anyway, what do you wanna do after we eat?"

"I know!"

Maria threw her hand up energetically.

"Go for it."

"Everything!"

"That's impossible. Let's start with what you want to do the most."

"Ehhh? Ok, let's go to the crepe stand then!"

"That's what you want to do most!? Wait, how much have you eaten today anyway!?"

I was seriously taken aback by her gluttonous appetite.

"? But crepes are really good. Don't you think so too?"

Maria tilted her head in confusion.

"...You can have another snack after three. We've got these free passes, so let's use 'em."

"Hmmm... Ok, then I wanna ride The Black Dragon!"

"Uu..."

I'm guessing everyone remembered the fear from earlier, because they all cringed.

"Let's give The Black Dragon a rest for today... It's too scary. Ok ?"

I was looking for some support from the rest of the club members, when all of a sudden,

"W-well, you might've been scared, but I was totally fine! I could ride it one more time no problem! Rather, I *want* to go ride it again! But I guess I'll skip it if you're all too scared~!"

Sena said, trying to act tough.

...Why can't you ever just be honest about this stuff...

"Hmph... Quit bluffing, Meat. You looked like you were about to die earlier."

A bitter smile rose to Yozora's face, and Sena's stiffened in return.

"Haa? You're the one who was so scared you were shaking like a leaf."

"Wha...!? I-I did no such thing! I was completely fine!"

Now even Yozora's trying to act tough.

"Hmph, I wonder about that. I know you were crying like a little girl when we rode it before!"

"What nonsense... You're the one who was crying, fish meat."

"'Kyaaa.'"

Sena imitated Yozora screaming in a monotone voice, causing Yozora's face to go bright red.

I certainly do think I heard Yozora go "Kyaaa" when we rode The Black Dragon in a normal, girly high pitched voice you'd never have thought would come from her, considering how deep her voice usually is.

It was so normal for a girl her age, I would've thought it was just one of the other female passengers if it weren't for her and Sena sitting up in front.

"I can still hear your scream perfectly in my head. Your crying voice as you went 'Kyaaa' - 'Kyaaa' - 'Kyaaa!' - 'Kyaaa, Mommy~' Ahaha, Yozora-chan, you're so c~u~t~e~ when you cry for mommy like a widdle baby! Gyahahaha!"

Sena tried to rile Yozora up with a strangely provocative expression and tone of voice.

"Gh... A-are you sure your memory isn't mistaken? Hmph, I guess that's what you get when you're dealing with a zombie meat woman who's got crap for brains..."

Yozora launched a counterattack, but it's a bona fide fact that she was screaming and crying before, so it didn't have much force behind it.

"Pfffft! Look evwybody, widdle crybaby Yozora-tan is trying to say something! Bhyahya!"

"Kgghh...! Y-you cried too, you stupid Meat!"

"I-I-I-I-I-I didn't cry. What are you talking about!?"

"Hmph, don't lie. Your eyes were red after crying so much when we fell. And besides, I know that you didn't just cry... you also wet your pants a little!"

"W-w-w-w-why do you kno-... A-a-a-as if I did that! Are you retarded!?"

Sena denied it with a beet red face.

Why did she stutter there...?

"Eh... Meat, did you really...?"

Yozora made a seriously creeped out face.

"O-o-o-o-o-of course not! That stupid little roller coaster wasn't scary at all! In fact, it was so boring I wanted to fall asleep! Actually, how do we know that *you* didn't wet *your* pants!?"

"Hmph, it hurts watching you make all these excuses, you rotten piece of ammonia-smelling Meat!"

"'Kyaaa.'"

"Agh...!!"

Yozora started trembling all over.

"T-then prove it! Ride The Black Dragon again without getting scared at all!"

"Fine with me! And you're coming with! I'll be so bored on it I'll even have time to take a picture of you bawling your eyes out! You can't make any more excuses once I've got it on film, now can you!?"

"Hmph, very well. That thing is as easy for me to ride as the train to school. I've got no reason to cry on something like that at all!"

"Yozora, weren't you really bad at riding the train when it's crowded?"

I shot out a quick quip at Yozora.

"What was that!?"

"...Nothing at all, ma'am."

I wonder if I can get Yozora and Sena to stop scaring people into silence with that look of theirs.

"...That aside, Meat, did you even bring a camera with you?"

"Heheh, I've been hiding it in this pocket all along."

"? Why would you go out of your way to hide it...?"

"W-who cares about that? It doesn't matter..."

"...?"

Sena hurriedly tried to change the subject as Yozora stood there, honestly confused.

That Sena, she couldn't have been taking peep shots of Yozora today too, right...? ...No, what am I saying, she probably was...

Anyway, that's how we ended up where we are now.

Yozora and Sena both agreed to go ride The Black Dragon again after lunch.

By the way, I firmly refused to join them on their trip, and even Maria, who wanted to ride it again said, "I want to ride it again, but I'd rather be with Onii-chan!" and so, ended up coming with me.

Rika, Yukimura, and Kobato were also tagging along with me.

...I remembered the time we all went to karaoke together while eating my neither good nor bad curry.

The five of us went off to do our own thing after we all finished eating lunch, leaving Sena and Yozora to ride The Black Dragon.

We figured we'd just go with whatever we saw nearby that looked fun.

The first thing we rode was a thrill ride called "The Viking" modeled after a pirate ship. It was pretty big, like everything else in this park, and went up fairly high too.

That said, a big ship that just rocks back and forth is nowhere near as abusive as The Black Dragon. In fact, it actually feels kinda refreshing.

"Ahahahaha~! We're so high up! Look how high up we are~! Being up high is so much fun~!"

Maria was in just as good a mood as she was on The Black Dragon.

"...Senpai, I don't feel too good."

Next to me was Rika, whose face had gone pale.

"Wh- What's wrong!?"

"I... It feels like I'm sea... sick."

"H-how can you get seasick when we're on land!? A-anyway, just hold it in! It's almost over!"

"Uuuu..."

.....

.....

...Rika managed to hold it in until the ride ended.

...Phew... That was one thrill I didn't see coming...

Next we decided to ride the free fall.

The main idea is simple really, all you do is go up and then it drops you, and honestly speaking, this is the second worst ride for me after The Black Dragon, but I had to ride it since Rika, Maria, and Kobato all said they wanted to.

"Aniki, I wish you the best of luck."

I got strapped in to the seat, and then the lift started to bring us up.

By the way, there are only four seats per ride, so Yukimura had to go without us on the next one.

We got farther and farther away from the ground, along with an unsettling vibration coming from the lift.

It feels like I'm about to be executed or something.

"Ahahahaha~! We're so high up! Look how high up we are~! Being up high is so much fun~!"

Maria was enjoying herself, as usual.

...So you don't care what it is, as long as you get to go up high, do you?

After we reached the top of the lift, our seats were pushed out away from it———— and then we fell.

"Nuowamuahhhhh!?"

I let out a pathetic shriek.

"Ahahahahaha!"

Maria was exploding with laughter.

"........!"

Kobato had her eyes shut tight.

"Fuck you, gravity! Fuck-fuck-fuck-fuck-fuck-fuck-fuck-fuck!!"

Rika switched into her other weird personality I saw back on The Black Dragon.

By the way, the “fucks” above ↑ were all said within about a second.

As we waited at the exit for Yukimura, Rika murmured something with a dead look in her eyes.

"...This isn't something civilized people enjoy. The only ones who can ride that thing and enjoy it are savages."

"Ahahahaha, that free fall was super fun~! Going up high and then falling was so fun~! Hey~ hey~ Onii-chan, wanna ride it again!? Do you!?"

"Shut your mouth, you damn dirty savage!!"

"Gyaahhhhh!?"

Rika looked pissed as she opened her eyes wide and shouted at Maria.

If I had to say, Rika looks more like the real savage here.

"......Rika is going to live in space when she grows up. Gravity can go eat shit."

"I see. I hope you're happy up there."

"Senpai, come live with me in space."

"No thanks."

"Ehhh~ Come on, let's purge the world of all these Neanderthals and their precious gravity~ We could drop a space colony on them or something~"

"Maybe, if I feel like it."

Yukimura came out of the exit just as I'd finished dealing with Rika spouting nonsense in a voice that sounded like a kid begging his mom for some candy.

He was as expressionless as always, but his eyes didn't seem to have much life in them.

"...Are you ok?"

"...It felt as though I were Rokusuke Keyamura."

"I see... it must've been rough."

...Knowing Yukimura, that was probably the name of some general from the Sengoku Era, but I didn't know the name, so I just gave him a vague reply.

Going on three thrill rides in a row would've been a little bit much, so we headed for the haunted house next.

It was a tiny, Japanese-style mansion sitting by itself in a corner of the park, and the sign board hanging down from it had " Haunted House" written in eerie-looking letters.

We were the only ones there, and hence, managed to get in right away.

This was the first time I'd ever been in a haunted house, but, how to put it, it's even more shoddy than I thought it'd be.

The monsters consisted of chopped off heads, dolls, fairies, etc. that were all so poorly made it was obvious they were fakes. You could see parts of the machines inside them, and hear the gears turn as the neck did on some of them... Seriously, at least make it so we can't see the machines...

Why is there such a huge gap in quality between the amazing rides like The Black Dragon, and the other ones like this haunted house and that costume show?

This is something I only found out later, but apparently this haunted house is one of the few remaining original attractions

from about 40 years ago when the park was built, and is due to be renewed soon.

"Hey~ hey~ Why is there a blanket hanging on the ceiling!?"

Maria asked, while pointing up at a piece of white cloth hanging down from the ceiling (the strings holding it were in plain sight).

They probably meant for it to be some kind of ghost or something.

"There's ghosts like that out in the world too... Flying blanket ones I mean."

"Do the sheets that old hag hangs out to dry fly too!? Those were ghosts!?"

"That was probably just the wind. These ones aren't like that, they can fly on their own (I think?)."

"Ehhh? Even though they're blankets!?"

"Even though they're blankets."

"Ahaha~! What the heck? I don't get it at all~!"

Maria was still full of energy, unfazed by the haunted house.

"Kukuku... Although they may indeed be my fellow clansmen of the night, to think they would allow lowly life forms such as humans to control them as such... Leysis vi Felicity Sumeragi commands you... Destroy yourselves immediately."

The very second Kobato said that to the woman-shaped doll wearing a kimono in front of her, its head fell right off.

"Fhyahhh!? An-chaaaann!!"

Kobato came running over, screaming, and then clung on to me.

...I gotta admit, that was some good timing. It even scared *me* a little bit.

Then it happened, right after I thought that.

Something started pulling on my sleeve from behind.

"...Uoh!?"

I had just gotten startled by that doll, so having the additional shock of getting grabbed from behind made me twitch in surprise.

I turned around, and saw it was a beautiful maid with a pale face grabbing on to me.

...It was just Yukimura though.

"W-what's the matter, Yukimura?"

"I-I'm terribly sorry, Aniki."

Yukimura looked a little flustered before letting go.

"...Did that scare you too?" I asked.

Yukimura nodded, his cheeks a little red.

"Yes, to a most shameful extent... I still have much to learn..."

"I don't think you really have to be ashamed about it... Actually, I'm relieved."

"Relieved...?"

Yukimura looked mystified as he tilted his head.

"Yeah. It's good to see that even you have things that make you panic."

"Aniki..."

Yukimura started staring at me with a blank look on his face.

I accidentally let my heart skip a beat seeing that, and quickly turned away to hide it.

He's cute, but he's a guy, he's a guy, he's a guy...!

"Gfufu... Thank you for the unexpected eye-candy, Senpai, Yukimura."

A disgusting smile rose to Rika's face.

Apparently that doll with the head that falls off was the last thing in the haunted house, because we got out after walking through a dark hallway a little while later.

"Man, that was kind of a letdown!" I said.

"I agree with you completely!" Rika said, with a nod.

"But, I do think that armored soldier's ghost that kept floating in front of us was super high quality. The rest was all retro machine designed stuff, but the way that ghost flew around was in a whole different dimension. In fact, it's kind of embarrassing, but even Rika couldn't tell how they managed to control it. I think it probably used lasers, but I couldn't find anything that looked like a sensor on the walls or ceiling no matter how much I looked~ It's gotta be a pretty detailed system to get it to float in front of us the whole time like that~ I kinda wish I could've figured out the trick~ "

She was talking as though she didn't really care one way or the other, but I could tell that she actually was frustrated she couldn't figure it out.

My reaction to that cute junior of mine who surprisingly hates losing was as follows:

".....T-there was a ghost in there...?"

I think our genius inventor, Rika Shiguma, might be able to see into the other world.

I left the haunted house with a cold chill running down my spine.

After the haunted house, we did three more thrill rides: the coffee cups, the swings, and go karts before getting on the Ferris wheel.

"Uohhh! This is super high~! Being up high is so fun~!"

...Maria must really like high places.

Maria generally liked every attraction we went to, but she gets particularly excited whenever we go on one that takes us up high.

The Ferris wheel we were riding right now was called the ' Aurora Borealis', and was one of Yokoshima Wonderland's more famous rides, which isn't surprising, considering that it's one of the biggest in Japan.

It used to boast being the largest attraction out of all of them until about 10 years ago when The Black Dragon stole that position .

That said, it lets you enjoy the view way up high, unlike The Black Dragon, and remains popular to this very day.

"Kukuku... They're like little ants..."

Kobato gave us one of her standard lines as she looked down at the people on the ground.

"Still, you can see how amazing The Black Dragon is when you look at it from up here."

It was easy to tell how huge it was when you looked at it from the top of the Ferris wheel.

It's insane when you think about how you fall from a spot higher than the top of the 'Aurora Borealis' where you can see not only the entire park, but way off into the horizon too.

"...Now that I think about it, I wonder what Yozora and Sena ended up doing."

They were the ones who were supposed to tell us when they wanted to meet up, but I had yet to get a text from either of them.

"Do you think they're still in line?" said Rika.

"Nah, no way."

I looked over at The Black Dragon's entrance.

There were more people than this morning, but even so, it didn't look like more than a 10-20 minute wait.

It's already been two hours since we split up with Yozora and Sena too.

I figured I'd call just to see what was up, but neither Sena nor Yozora answered.

"Do you think they're just too busy arguing with each other to notice?"

"You know, they probably are."

I had to agree with Rika's deduction.

"...Oh well, should we go look for them?"

We headed over to The Black Dragon's entrance area after getting off the Ferris wheel.

It's technically possible that they went over to other attractions, but I really doubt it considering how bad they get along.

I tried calling them again when we were walking over, but, as I'd expected, I didn't get an answer.

While wondering just what the heck they were doing, I started darting my eyes left and right, looking for them as we walked.

And, just a short while later,

"Aniki. I have discovered their location."

Yukimura said in a calm tone of voice, raising his finger and pointing at something.

I looked at where he was pointing, and saw a girl with short black hair sitting next to one with blond hair on a bench about 10 meters away from us.

"Oh, there they are."

We quickly walked over to their bench.

Yozora was there in her boyish clothes, as was Sena in her flashy, but cute ones.

The way they were sitting together, resting on each other's shoulders, made it look like a young boy with black hair was out on a date with his blond-haired girlfriend, flirting with her. Honestly, it looked very picturesque.

...As you got closer though, you could see that was a huge mistake. Their eyes were half rolled back, their mouths were just hanging wide open, they looked like they were sick, and I could even see that their cheeks were stiff, probably from screaming too much.

They looked just like a... zombie couple.

"...What the hell did you guys do?"

I timidly asked, and they both answered, "Ah, Kodaka..." in a voice that sounded more like a moan than anything else.

"...A-are you guys…?"

"Ughh... My head hurtsh..."

"I feel shick..."

Yozora and Sena both answered in turn, like a pair of zombies.

"What the heck happened...?"

"...We rode it..." said Yozora.

"Rode it...? The Black Dragon?"

They both gave a weak nod.

"Eijht times..."

Sena moaned out a follow up to what Yozora said.

"...? Eight times...? Ummm..."

I told myself there was no way, but asked anyway to be sure.

"...You rode The Black Dragon eight times?"

They both nodded.

Just riding it once was enough to severely damage your mind and body, and here these two went and rode it eight times in a couple hours...

"Are you retarded?"

I stated my honest thoughts to them, which resulted in two pairs of bloodshot eyes glaring at me.

Holy shit, that's scary!

They look like they're about to pass out, but those stares of theirs aren't any weaker than usual. In fact, they're actually scarier.

"...It's because Yozora wouldn't just admit she lost..."

"...It's because Meat wouldn't just go and die already..."

They both glared at each other.

"...So you decided to keep riding until one of you gave up, and in the end you both rode it eight times...?"

They both nodded again.

Sheesh... There's a limit to being a sore loser, ya' know.

"Wow~ So, who won?"

Rika just had to ask, didn't she?

Yozora and Sena then said, while glaring at each other,

"...There isn't a winner yet... Ghh..."

"...Now then... It's about time to start round nine... Uuu..."

Their voices were so deep they sounded like a zombie's moans, but they both managed to stand up, albeit barely.

I have to admit that their iron will to continue the battle no matter how badly they get hurt is admirable, but this is one showdown that just isn't worth the effort.

And I mean, I get the feeling their lives might actually be in danger if they keep this up.

"Give it a rest, you both fought well... Just call it a draw and shake hands, ok?"

"I refuse...!" "I'd rather die...!"

They both replied instantly.

"This piece of meat is the one thing I'll..." "Yozora is the one person I'll..."

""Never lose t——

OgEHhhHhHHhHhhhH""""

Aaaand they barfed.

Forcing themselves to yell that loud when they were already barely standing caused them both to spectacularly throw up everything in their stomachs at almost the exact same time.

"Ugeh! Eww, they threw up! Nasty!"

Maria said that cold, hard truth without even the slightest hint of tact or consideration.

"Uguah..." "Uegh..."

They both spent the next little while hunched over, going " guehh guehh" as they threw up.

"A-are you two ok...?"

I was worried about them, but couldn't stop myself from letting out a big sigh.

These two are such a handful.

Anyway, at least this means their little match is over.

...By the way, I was actually standing right in front of them, and as a result, got some of their puke on my clothes..... I want to cry. ..

Hot Springs

After Yozora and Sena relaxed on the bench long enough to finally be able to move again, we left Yokoshima Wonderland, and moved over to the adjacent hot springs area called "Hot Spring Paradise".

The janitor who had to come clean up the mess they've made scolded them by saying, "You're not little kids anymore, you need to know when to take a break so you can enjoy your time here." It must've had some effect, because both Yozora and Sena kept quiet.

One of the reasons we came to the hot springs area was to relax a little, but my main priority was using the laundromat inside to clean the puke off my clothes.

I can't exactly get on the train with puke on me...

I rented a yukata, changed into it, and then threw my dirty clothes into a fully automated laundry machine before heading off for the hot springs.

"Alright, let's meet up at four o'clock, ok?"

After deciding on a time to meet up, the men and women went to their respective changing rooms.

Yukimura and Maria went with me.

.....

.....

"...Wait, what!? Maria!?"

I was shocked to see Maria merrily walking around behind me as though she were doing a little dance.

"Hmm?" said Maria with her head tilted to the side.

"No, don't give me “hmm”. Why are you going with us to the men's side?"

"'Cause it says girls 10 and younger can go into the men's bath!"

"Well, yeah, there's no problem age wise, but... Doesn't it make more sense to go to the women's side when there are other girls with you?"

"Hmmm..."

Maria had a slightly hesitant look on her face as she said,

"Yozora and Sena both **reek of puke**. I don't want to take a bath with them."

"Oghohh..."

I reflexively twitched and made a bitter smile in response to the destructive power of Maria's blunt statement.

She's as honest as ever, for better or worse.

Man, kids can be really harsh...

I bet even Yozora and Sena would get depressed if they heard her say that.

"Alright, that's fine I guess... Let's go to the men's bath then."

"Yay! I get to take a bath with Onii-chan!"

Maria said, showing me a brilliant smile.

And so, we reached the changing rooms.

The changing rooms, starring Yukimura Kusunoki.

...Do I really have to withstand that mental training again?

I almost wanted to cry as I carefully searched for a place we could change.

Luckily, nobody else was changing right now, so I didn't have to deal with everyone shooting strange looks at Yukimura in his maid uniform.

I managed to find a spot you couldn't see from the entrance to the changing rooms or from the door that led to the baths, that was

a safe distance away from any other stalls that had other people's clothes in them, so we set up camp there and began changing.

"Yayyy~!"

Maria threw off her clothes and got naked in a flash.

She then tossed them into her basket, and said,

"Hurry up Onii-chan, let's go, let's go!"

"Y-you go on ahead. I'm kinda slow."

"Hmmm, OK!"

I then said to Maria, who started happily running off, "Ah, hey! You forgot your towel!" and threw a towel over to her.

"Thanks, Onii-chan!"

"Make sure you wash up good before you get in the bath! And don't wear your towel in the bath either!"

"O~K! Time to swim~!"

"No it's not!"

"Ahahaha~!"

Maria's feet went plip-plop before she disappeared into the baths.

...Now then... I think it's time for me to change too...

I snuck a glance over at Yukimura, and happened to catch him right as he'd taken off his apron.

As usual, that body of his is so thin and delicate I just can't see him as a guy.

Especially his waist... Why is it so thin?

I quietly took a step away from Yukimura, and undid the string on my yukata after making sure he couldn't see me.

As I did,

"Aniki."

"Y-yeah?"

I replied with my back turned to him.

"I'm terribly sorry, but might you be so kind as to undo the button on the back of my uniform again?"

"S-sure."

Apparently that button up by the back of his neck is hard to reach. He had me help him with it when we went to the pool too.

I undid the button, and saw the beautiful white skin on the nape of his neck that, like the rest of his body, looked nothing like a guy's, causing me to back away from him in a panic.

Ahh, I'm so nervous...!

I took off my yukata and underwear in a hurry, and quickly threw them into my basket.

I then grabbed a towel, and said,

"W-well then, I'll be off now!"

"OK... Aniki..."

I took one last glance at Yukimura's face, and saw that he was blushing for some reason.

These hot springs were already pretty popular even before Yokoshima Wonderland was built, so it's no wonder that the baths in 'Hot Spring Paradise' were incredibly nice.

There were three large bathtubs along with a sauna, cold bath, jacuzzi, electric bath, and just about every other kind of bath you could imagine.

I needed to wash up first, so I grabbed a wooden tub off the pile of them sitting near the entrance, and made my way to the showers.

"Ah! Onii-chan, over here, over here!"

Maria, who had already washed herself off earlier, saw me walking towards the showers and waved me over.

"Coming."

I sat down next to Maria, and started washing myself with the shower's hot water from my head down.

I let out a breath of relief as I washed away the sweat and dirt from the amusement park.

And that's about as far as I got before I heard Yukimura's voice from behind me.

"Aniki. Allow me to wash your back."

I turned around and saw him standing there, naked.

Although technically he did have a towel covering him from the chest down to just below his waist.

温泉での一幕

「あにき。
おせなかをお流しいたします」

"S-seriously, why do you cover your chest...!?"

"It's embarrassing to show my chest to others due to it not being manly like yours, Aniki..."

"Oh yeah, that's right..."

I'm pretty sure he told me that back in the locker room at the pool.

"Although, if you order me not to cover it, then I shall..."

"I'm not ordering you! Please, for the love of God, keep on covering it!"

I pleaded Yukimura, who'd been bashfully mumbling his words , to keep the towel on.

"Oh, I see..."

Yukimura made a face that looked a little upset.

"By the way, allow me to wash your..."

"I-I'm fine! I can do it myself!"

"There is no need to restrain yourself on my account."

I turned my back to Yukimura, and told him,

"I'm not restraining myself—— I just don't want you of all people to wash my back!"

Ah, crap.....

.....T-that might've been a little bit too harsh on him. I timidly turned around, and looked up at Yukimura's face again.

"Aniki..."

There were tears welling up in his eyes, and his face was filled with a look of sorrow so strong it felt like my heart was getting ripped out of my chest just looking at him.

"I see... Aniki has no need for one such as I. Now that it has come to this, I may as well cut open my stomach and end it all..."

Yukimura started to run away (my blood started really pumping as I saw that lovely butt of his that, just like the rest of his body, looked nothing like a man's) but I hurriedly called out to stop him.

"H-hold on—— Don't run away! Wash it for me—— I'd like it very much if you could wash my back for me!"

"Aniki..."

Yukimura turned around, and an absurdly cute smile rose to his face.

I turned my back to him again, unable to keep looking at that face of his.

"W-well? Come on! Hurry up and do it! H-here's the soap, and this is the shower!"

I shut my eyes tight so I wouldn't accidentally see Yukimura in the mirror, and then stuck my hands out backwards to give him the shampoo and shower head.

"Thank you for allowing me to receive your order. I shall put my heart and soul into serving you, Aniki."

Said Yukimura in an extremely cute voice, before starting to scrub my back.

I had the chairman wash my back once before, too, and honestly , I've gotta say that having someone else wash your back for you feels good.

However unlike the chairman's hard scrubbing, Yukimura's was a little weak, and at times, tickled.

".....Hn... Haa... Ngha... Hahh..."

...Yukimura sounded like he was really scrubbing with all he had, and I could hear his feverish... hell, sexy pants behind me.

No, no, wait, it's not sexy! It's not sexy at all!

He's just washing my back for me!

Yukimura's arms and chest would touch my back every now and then, and each time they did, I was assaulted by an indescribably good feeling.

But it's still not sexy! We're both guys. It's not sexy at all!

Yukimura's touch was, much unlike the chairman's hard muscles, incredibly smooth and soft. In fact, it was so much so, that I couldn't possibly imagine him being the same gender as me.

Especially his—— chest.

It would be much more fitting to call that faintly springy touch as one belonging to "breasts" rather than simply a "chest".

...Kh... Hang in there, oh sanity of mine...!

Squish

Squash

Squhsh

...I-I can't do it... I'm gonna go insane if he doesn't stop soon...!

I shut my eyes tight and prayed to myself in my head, "End already! End already!"

And as I did,

"Ohh, so this is what a dick looks like~"

Said Maria, who'd been sitting next to me, washing herself off, as she took the towel I had wrapped around my waist.

"Wha...!?"

I opened my eyes by reflex and saw Maria right in front of me.

"Wow~"

Maria stared at my crotch, seemingly very interested in it.

"Wow~ This is totally different from the one Rika showed me on her laptop~ That one was really scary, but Onii-chan's looks really nice!"

In what way!?

More importantly, having someone stare at me down there is pretty embarrassing, even if she was just a kid.

My body started to heat up due to the embarrassment.

"Hey~ hey~ Onii-chan, can I touch it?"

"No! And give me my towel back!"

I snatched my towel back from Maria, who'd been holding it out in the open, and put it back around my waist.

"I bet it would've been fun too..."

...Fun she says.

She can say the most ridiculous stuff at the drop of a hat, this girl.

"Hey~ hey~ Why do you have that weird thing?"

"Why...? And what do you mean, 'weird thing'...?"

Should I just tell her something similar to what you'd learn in a sex ed. class?

.....Yeah, let's not do that.

It's too embarrassing to actually say it, even to a little girl. Also her sister Kate might get mad at me if I did that.

"...It's because that's just how guys are."

I gave her a quick non-answer, to which she nodded, and then,

"Then how come **Yukimura doesn't have one**?"

said that

utterly ridiculous

statement.

"Huh?"

I let out a confused voice with a stupid look on my face, still not sure what Maria just said.

"Ahaha, Yukimura's a guy, but he doesn't have one, so weird~ So there are guys who have them and guys who don't, huh~"

"What the heck are you...?"

"It is on account of me still lacking much experience..."

I could see Yukimura's blushed cheeks and embarrassed expression in the mirror.

Uh, what do you mean, lacking experience?

What does experience have to do with this?

"Ohh~? So you don't have one if you're inexperienced~"

Maria sounded honestly curious.

No-no-no-no... Hahaha, but that doesn't make any-
Wait-wait-wait.

"That is true."

"Then you'll grow one once you aren't inexperienced anymore?"

"Yes."

No-no-no-no-no-no-no-no, this still doesn't make any sense...

"I see~ Onii-chan really is amazing then, since he's experienced ~"

"Yes. Aniki is truly an outstanding individual."

Hey-hey-hey-hey-hey-hey-hey-hey-hey...

"Ahaha, I hope you can be like Onii-chan soon, Yukimura!"

"As do I. I shall work hard to do so."

"Daaaahhhhh!! What the hell are you saying!?"

I turned around behind me, having reached the peak of my confusion.

What I saw there, was Yukimura's figure.

He had his towel that he'd been using to wash my back in his hand, and thus, had nothing to hide his body with now.

So there was Yukimura, sitting there with one knee up.

His beautiful white skin, his dainty body, his chest with two slightly—— only slightly, budding mounds, and a waist that looked like it'd snap if you hugged him too hard.

And then, in the middle of that waist, in the space between his left and right legs——

What should have been there, was not.

Or rather, in this case, perhaps it would be better to say that what should not have been there was naturally not.

He. Did. Not. Have. One.

"Aniki, this is embarrassing."

Yukimura gently hid her chest.

Don't you think there's something more important to cover than that chest so tiny people would believe you if you told them it was a man's!? Is what I would have liked to shout, but all I could do was stand there with my mouth opening and closing like some kind of fish.

...I thought back, really thought back on some things.

When Yozora, Sena and I first met Yukimura, we took her claim that she was a man at face value, and never went to actually check if that was the case. (Not that you'd normally ever do this anyway)

Back when we went to the pool, and even in the changing room this time, I was unable to look right at her as she was changing.

I just kept telling myself "He's a guy. He's a guy. He's a guy. He's a guy." without ever actually checking to see.

A high school boy that looks just like a beautiful girl—— Why on Earth did I ever believe something like that actually existed?

How many times did I tell myself stuff like "I just cannot think of him as a guy," or "He looks exactly like a girl, no matter how you look at it," I wonder.

If something looks exactly like a beautiful girl, then chances are pretty good it really is a beautiful girl.

Let's think about this calmly, and rationally.

There's no way someone this cute could be a guy——...

A Tale of the Unattached and the Unlucky

And so, it turns out Yukimura was a girl.

After I'd realized that shocking truth, I dragged Yukimura out of the baths in a panic, made her change her clothes in a big hurry, and went to the waiting room.

Obviously, leaving a **girl** in the guy's bath area was just about the worst idea ever.

I sat Yukimura down in one of the waiting room seats, and stood in front of **her**.

"Aniki, is there something the matter?"

"Yukimura... I have something important to talk to you about."

I then told Yukimura, who had her head tilted in confusion.

"Yukimura... The truth is, you're a woman."

.....

...The truth is, you're a woman.

...I tried repeating it inside my head, but it still made no sense to me, even though I was the one who said it.

Frankly, it was incredibly ridiculous.

Why am I, with a completely serious face, telling someone what gender they are?

I bet if anybody saw us, they'd think we were morons.

In any case, Yukimura's reaction was as follows:

"Hahaha, such jokes you tell."

She said it with a smile.

That face of hers really was insanely cute. It's a mystery how I ever managed to think she was a guy this whole time.

"Uh, no, it's not a joke..."

How am I supposed to explain this...

I tried to explain it as simply as possible so that Yukimura would get it.

However, seeing as how I am a normal high school boy and not a health teacher, giving a straight explanation of this to a girl my age was far too difficult, and no matter how hard I tried, I ended up describing the more specific parts in an exceptionally roundabout manner.

Maria was even standing next to me, listening to my sex ed. lecture with great interest.

"So, you see... Uhh... No matter how hard you try... Hell, how would you even do that... You'll never, um, grow one..."

Actually, now that I think about it, no sex ed. teacher has ever had to explain something so obvious, have they...

Yukimura made a puzzled expression after hearing my explanation.

"As is usual, your stories can be quite difficult to grasp at times, Aniki..."

"No, no, no, I haven't said one hard thing to understand this whole time, have I!? I'm not telling some joke or a scary story right now!"

This is way too hard for me...

I mean, come on, I'm not even good at *normal* conversation!

And it's not like I have any friends to increase my conversation skills with either!

...Ah, that made me depressed.

But seriously, what am I gonna do with her?

If only Rika were here, she's good at talking about this kind of thing.

"...Haa... She's always around when you don't want her, but the one time I actually need her, she's gone. Rika is so useless, I swear...."

"Why is Kodaka-senpai insulting me all of a sudden...!?"

I heard a surprised voice behind me, and when I turned around, I saw that Rika was standing right there...

"Oh, Rika. Good timing."

"You talk to me just like that!? Even though I just heard you insulting me a second ago!?"

Rika had her eyes open wide as she said some nonsense.

She's as incomprehensible as ever.

"That aside, you got out pretty fast, huh."

We still had over an hour before we were supposed to meet up.

"...That sadist side of Kodaka-senpai that insists on acting like nothing happened actually turns Rika on, haa haa... But, anyways, Yozora-senpai and Sena-senpai both passed out in the sauna. They're sitting in front of the fan in the changing room right now, so Rika came out to buy some Pocarin."

"They went into a sauna of all places in the state they were in...? Knowing them, they probably ended up having a competition to see who could stay in longer, didn't they?" Rika nodded in the affirmative.

"It started over an argument about each of them accusing the other of spraying them with water and flinging soap bubbles around when they were in the middle of washing themselves."

"What are they? A bunch of punks going around looking for fights?"

"And, before I knew it, they were both red as lobsters in the sauna... Those two share a cruel fate where they are destined to fight any time they look at each other."

"It's pointless to try and make it sound cool... But yeah, I guess it really doesn't make much sense to expect those two to get along and relax while they take a bath together, does it..."

I wore a look of defeat on my face and sighed.

"Speaking of that, aren't you both fast getting out as well?"

"Oh, that..."

I had Maria take the Pocarin to Yozora and Sena in Rika's place for now, and then explained the situation to her.

"...So Yukimura really was a girl this whole time?"

Rika heard the story, and was understandably dumbfounded.

"...'Scuse me for a moment here."

"Hyan-"

Rika crouched down in front of Yukimura, and stuck her hand up Yukimura's skirt without any hesitation.

"Wh- Rika!?"

Rika felt around Yukimura's crotch, ignoring me and my shock.

"Ah-... Ahn... Nnn... Nn- Ahh..."

Yukimura's cheeks became flushed, and she let out a set of strangely coquettish moans.

Uwaa...

It was so awkward I didn't know where to look.

In contrast to me, Rika's expression didn't change in the slightest as she felt up Yukimura with a face as calm as a scientist experimenting on a lab rat.

She then drew her hand out of Yukimura's skirt.

"...Sir, there's no mistake. It's a girl."

Rika said to me as though she'd just delivered someone's baby.

"Uh, yeah, that's what I just said."

"...Well, you know, I just had to see for myself."

She looked calm, but I get the feeling she's just as shocked as I am.

"And so, I leave the explanation of this to Yukimura in your hands. You're the only one I can count on for this."

"Even if you only rely on me at times like these, I... Anyway, wait a second. I'll go get my cell phone from my bag."

Rika wore a slight look of disappointment on her face, but in the end, agreed to do it.

After she came back, cell phone in hand,

"Ok, leave hi-... her to me. Yukimura, come over here for a little bit."

"Where are you going?"

"Somewhere we can be alone. This isn't the kind of thing you want other people overhearing after all. It might be necessary to play some rather shocking footage as well."

"...I see. I've got no idea what you're planning on doing, but I'm counting on you."

"Please just leave it to me. Now then, shall we go, Yukimura?"

"Ok..."

Rika then walked off with Yukimura, who was wearing a mystified look on her face.

I lost sight of them, but they returned after about 15 minutes had passed.

"Aniki..."

I'd been spacing out on a chair, and before I knew it, Yukimura was standing next to me, her face as pale as a ghost.

Damn that was scary... I didn't sense her coming up on me at all ...

"'Rika-sensei's Birds And The Bees Lecture' was a complete success."

Rika said, standing next to Yukimura, as though she'd just finished some big surgery or something.

It sure doesn't look like she just finished a simple 'Birds And The Bees Lecture'.

"I see... Good work, Rika-sensei."

"Not at all," said Rika, giving me a quick bow.

I still couldn't read Yukimura's face as she opened her mouth and said,

"Aniki. I am... not a Japanese male..."

"Well, yeah, you're not a guy after all."

There were little tears welling up in Yukimura's eyes.

"Uoh!? H-hold on, don't cry, Yukimura!"

"...I apologize for my conduct."

Yukimura bowed her head at me as I stood there, flustered, and then gently wiped her tears away.

...Looks like this was a big shock to her.

"......Hey, um, why did you ever think you were a guy to begin with?"

I wasn't sure if that was something I should ask, but I did anyway.

There must be some complicated reasons for her to have lived her whole life unaware of such a huge mistake.

Yukimura stayed silent for a short while before she began to speak in a tiny voice.

"Family circumstances."

"Uh-huh..."

I wonder just what kind of circumstances she has... I gulped down my saliva as I waited for her next words.

.....

.....?

"...Umm, is that it?"

"...?"

Yukimura tilted her head, puzzled.

"Eh, that's your whole explanation!?"

"Yes."

Yukimura gave me a firm nod.

"Ehhh..."

I thought that was too short no matter how you slice it, though I guess I was prying into things a little bit too much.

Family circumstances, is it...

Well, they did give her the name "Yukimura" as if she were some kind of Sengoku Era general, so I can see how they might be a little, eccentric...

And apparently they gave her the name hoping she'd grow up to be a true Japanese man like Yukimura Sanada...

I wonder if it's something like... they used to be a famous samurai family, but ended up having to make a girl the next heir since no boy was born...

Anyway, that's what I went with for now.

"...Still, it's pretty amazing you went this long without anyone finding out about this."

Yukimura had always acted completely defenseless. She never tried to hide the fact she was a girl, and even changed in the same room as the rest of the guys like it was nothing.

I know that all the guys ran out of the room when they were changing for P.E., but I still think it's nothing short of a miracle nobody ever noticed this whole time.

"Actually, it seems that there have been people who noticed and pointed it out to her before," Rika interjected.

"Apparently she didn't take them seriously though."

"Ahh..."

That's right, she insisted I was joking when I told her she was a woman just now.

I'd bet anything she reacted the exact same way to the people who pointed it out before.

When you think about it like that, it's kind of amazing how Rika managed to convince her...

"Do you see Rika in a new light now, Senpai?"

Rika must've guessed what I was thinking or something, because she sounded pretty proud of herself.

"Yeah, I do. You're awesome."

"Hau...!"

Rika's face went bright red when I gave her a simple pat on the head the same way I do to Kobato and Maria.

"W-what are you doing all of a sudden!? What are you going to do if you shake Rika's genius brain too much and break it!?"

"Eh, ah, my bad..."

I took my hand off her head, since she looked mad about it for some reason.

She doesn't like getting her head patted... I'll remember that.

I then noticed Yukimura staring over at me.

"...Yukimura?"

"Aniki... Am I still your underling, despite not being a man?"

Those eyes tinged with moistness.

That gaze, staring at me as though hoping for something.

Her nervous voice.

Yukimura, who now looked so fragile she might break at the slightest touch.

...She needs something to support her.

And so, I placed my hand on Yukimura's head, and told her, while gently rubbing her hair,

"Of course you are. You'll always be my underling, both now and forever. I'll be counting on you."

Yukimura stared up at me with a blank expression on her face as I rubbed her head, and then, all of a sudden, a lovely smile bloomed upon her face.

"As you wish, Aniki. I shall continue to serve you, just as I have been."

————!

Crap, my heart just skipped a beat or ten.

Gotta calm down, this is a guy... Wait, no she isn't...!

...She's not a guy, so... huh? Doesn't that mean it's only normal for my heart to be pounding like this? Ahh, thank God. Phew...

"...Mu! ...Rika would've UNIVERSE'd at this situation just a short while ago... but what is this feeling... I can't describe it."

Rika was standing next to us, and seemed unsatisfied as she looked over at Yukimura and I with one eye half open.

A short while later, Yozora and Sena joined us in the waiting room.

They were wearing rental yukatas, and each was holding an empty bottle of Pocarin.

The both of them, especially Yozora, still looked sick too.

After I told them about the thing with Yukimura,

".....What do I do? Yukimura looks really cute to me all of a sudden. She might actually be pretty moe..."

Sena gave a favorable(?) reaction, albeit confused.

"M-moe...?"

"Yeah, I mean, she's a pretty girl in a maid uniform."

...You can say that like it's common sense all you want, but I still don't get it.

Sena aside, Yozora seemed to be fairly shocked by it. Her mouth and eyes were wide open, and she looked incredibly wobbly as she went to rub her forehead, and then slumped down into a chair as if she'd fallen over.

".....Kh... How careless of me... I was sure she was just a really cute guy...!"

"Wh- Yozora, you ok?"

Sena called out to Yozora, who was mumbling something with her face down, which caused Yozora to flick her head up and glare at Sena.

"She's cute, and honest, and obedient!! And on top

of that, she's serving him as a maid!! This is bullshit!!"

"......!"

Sena gasped and looked like she figured something out after hearing Yozora's cryptic yell for some reason.

Rika joined them and gave a quiet "Hrm..." looking like she just realized something too.

Yukimura herself just stood there, expressionless, with her head tilted.

I had no clue what Yozora was so mad about either.

And it was even more mysterious that Sena and Rika seemed to have guessed what she meant.

As I was wondering about all that,

Drrriiiippp...

A red line started to drip out of Yozora's nose, her face a deep shade of red from yelling just now.

"Yozora-senpai, quick, you've got a nosebleed."

"!? Auu..."

Yozora made a frown on her face.

"Yozora-anego, please make use of this."

Yukimura took a tissue out of one of the pockets of her maid uniform, and handed it to Yozora.

"...And she's considerate too...!"

Yozora complimented Yukimura, but seemed irritated about it for some reason.

"You need to take it easy when you aren't feeling well..."

"S-shut up! Don't look at me, idiot!"

I let out a sigh, and Yozora pointed her angry face down at the ground.

I then heard her mumble something in a nasally voice, almost as if she were crying.

"...I hate this, I can't take it anymore... Why do I have such terrible luck... Why do things never go how I want them to..."

It was an incredibly faint and weak voice, much unlike her usual self.

A little later, around four o'clock, Maria and Kobato came out as well.

Both their bodies were moist with steam rising off of them.

Looks like Maria went in the women's bath too.

"I got to swim a whole bunch~!"

"I told you not to swim in the bath!"

I reprimanded Maria, who was still full of energy, and then added,

"You too, Kobato. Give the swimming a break for once..."

"Kukuku... I did nothing of the sort..."

"I only thought it was ok to swim because I saw the vampire swimming first!"

"Ahh! Why'd ya' tell him that ya' idiot!? I told ya' not ta' tell him anythin', didn't I!?"

Kobato lost her composure after having Maria tell on her.

"Kobato..."

I gave her a scornful look, and she replied by turning her back and saying, "Ku.... Kukuku... Still, I was victorious in our crab-walk competition..." and then made a faintly triumphant smile.

"You did that too? You can't be bothering the other people here like that."

"It's fine! The old ladies all said 'It's nice to see you girls full of energy' to us!"

"Kukuku... They may have been a repulsive bunch of dekepit humans, but I must give them praise for realizing my true power... "

"It was really funny seeing how stretched out all the old ladies' boobs were~! I hope Sena and the old hag's boobs get stretchy like theirs soon too!"

"Kukuku... How foolish of you to be surprised at such trivialities, pawn of God... Old women in the demon realm can spread theirs out and use them like wings..."

Here we have a perfect example of little girl and middle schooler with far too little tact.

I'm not sure which is worse though, the two high school girls who collapsed having a competition in the sauna, or these two.

Afterwards, I grabbed my washed clothes from the coin laundry , and put them on (they were still kinda wet, but I just had to deal with it) before we all left "Hot Springs Paradise".

Soon after we got on the train back home, Kobato and Maria fell asleep resting on each other's shoulders.

A few minutes later, Yozora and Sena followed suit, and started breathing softly as they fell asleep next to each other.

Our two **female** juniors, Rika and Yukimura, also fell asleep before I knew it, leaving me as the only one still awake.

The new experiences at the amusement park have completely annihilated the members of the Neighbors Club.

They all look like perfectly normal, cute girls when they're sleeping. If only they were always like this...

Sleepiness quickly began to assault me too as I let out a deep sigh.

I've gotta do my best to ward off this drowsiness, otherwise it's highly likely that we'll go right past our stop.

However, today was ridiculously tiring, both physically and mentally, and I quickly reached my limit.

Crap... My eyelids are so... heavy...

Right as I was about to fall asleep,

".....Aniki..."

Yukimura, who was sitting next to me, grabbed on to my sleeve.

I looked at Yukimura's face, surprised, but saw that her eyes were closed, and that there were faint breaths coming out of her slightly opened mouth as she slept.

I could feel her softness through her maid uniform as she leaned her body against me, which prompted me to remember how her bare skin was right up against mine in the hot springs, causing my face to heat up.

It's true I thought she was a guy, but still... Her um, chest, and... my back...

...I went and did something pretty crazy... (Or maybe it was done *to* me?)

Thinking back on it, those two mounds I felt pressing against me just might have really been her-... Aguah...!

Although my drowsiness was now long gone thanks to Yukimura, I spent the rest of that train ride home being tortured anyway.

Let The Second Semester Begin

Maria slept over at our place, we went through those awful orders in the King's Game, I almost kissed Sena, I got a weird call from Dad, a lot happened at the amusement park, and we found out Yukimura was a girl at the hot springs, which had me considerably flustered, to say the least.

However, our five day break after finals was now over, and the curtains opened on the second semester here at St. Chronica Academy.

And as is customary of the first day after break, everyone was busy comparing answers with the test sheets they'd gotten back.

As for my grades, I did pretty good in English, and everything else was right around the school average. Basically, not much of a change from my grades at my previous schools.

Apparently all my studying for World History, with its relatively niche questions, was worth it after all, seeing as how I pulled off a grade above the average there as well.

These final exams also served as a sort of "Can I make it in this school? (academic edition)" to me, and as such, had more significance than a test typically does.

Honestly, I'm pretty happy that I was able to get grades I can be satisfied with.

Now then, all that's left is the "Can I make it in this school? (high school life edition)". There is one thing that is indispensible for leading a fulfilling high school life—— and that something would be friends.

OK, time to get back out there and try to make some friends again!

I'd renewed my determination, so I headed over to the Neighbors Club after school, just like I had last semester.

"...You're practically panting."

Yozora looked at me with disdain in her eyes as we walked together.

She seemed fairly upset about something yesterday, so I was relieved to see her back to her "normal" levels of displeasure.

"Was I breathing that hard? ...Anyway, I was just thinking about giving it my all this semester, too."

"...You know, people involuntarily want to kick other people when they see them with stupidly optimistic attitudes."

"No, that's just you."

Yozora was just as insane as she always was.

"By the way, how'd your tests go?"

I asked, for no particular reason, upon which Yozora made a small frown, and said,

"...Not very well."

"Oh?"

"I-I couldn't help it. I hardly got to study at all..."

Seeing Yozora purse her lips and try to make excuses was actually kind of funny.

"What'd you get?"

"I-I don't want to say... I-it was just bad luck, that's all!"

She turned her face away from me in embarrassment.

I started wanting to tease her after seeing that unusual reaction.

"Haha, it's no big deal, they say everyone has an off day every now and then. Come on, just tell me what you got."

"I-I don't wanna..."

The way Yozora said that as if she were pouting was ridiculously cute.

"Well then just tell me what you got for first period... What'd you get on Math II?"

"......N-ninety seven points."

Yozora said, in a tiny voice that sounded like she was truly embarrassed.

"...Eh?"

"...I got a 97. Haa... Why did I make that stupid mistake..."

"......N-niNeTy SevEn pOIntS, huh... haha..."

97 points out of a possible 100—— It should go without saying that that's a great score nobody could complain about.

And that was for Math II, too, where all the problems are generally hard, and where I'm pretty sure the average was a lot lower than the other subjects.

"Umm, what about second period... What about Japanese History?"

"...96. I made such a dumb mistake there..."

Yozora answered in that same shy voice as before.

"...What about the Oral English test?"

"95. Haa... I'm so bad at talking to others... Haa..."

...By the way, I got an 87 on that one.

The school average was 59, so my score should be plenty good as is, but seeing someone sigh at getting a 95 on it makes me think my score's actually not that great after all.

"...U-umm, fourth period was gym, so... What about Modern Japanese?"

"**100 points.**"

"A hundred!?"

My voice cracked as I yelped in response to Yozora's cool declaration.

I see... So it's possible to get perfect scores in high school after all...

"Haa... I did so bad this time around... I made a bunch of careless mistakes in everything except Modern Japanese~"

Now she was talking in an incredibly obvious monotone voice.

"I-I dunno if I'd call that bad..."

It was then that I finally realized that behind Yozora's shy words and gestures full of regret, was a tiny smile formed by the corners of her mouth inching up slightly.

"W-what about sixth period... H-how was World History?"

"Haa~ World History was my worst one of all~... I only got 93 on it..."

"How is any of that bad!? Those are all high scores!"

I retorted, unable to hold back, to which she replied by going, " Pft-..." along with a faint smile, and then said,

"I did pretty bad compared to last year. It'd be hard to say I got good scores. Haa... It's so embarrassing~ (monotone)"

"...I-I see."

Yozora then grinned, and her face was covered with an impish smile.

Crap.

"By the way Kodaka, how did you do?"

"M-me? I did, well... I-I didn't do too well either!"

"What was your actual score?"

"W-who cares about that, my scores aren't worth hearing..."

"You're not planning on keeping quiet about your scores after making me tell you all about my embarrassing ones, now are you? —— Pft-"

Yozora probably couldn't hold it in anymore, since she let out that little noise at the end there.

"Uu...!"

T-this woman... There's no doubt about it...

She never thought her scores were anything close to embarrassing.

That "I hardly got to study" excuse she mentioned earlier, the way she seemed embarrassed as she hid her face from me, it was all a trap to get me into thinking I had the upper hand so I'd ask her about her scores.

In fact, it's entirely possible she set this trap up well aware that I was actually pleased with the grades I got.

"Come on, Kodaka, just throw it out there. Why don't you try and spit it out to me, who got 97, 96, 94, 100, and 93 on her tests?"

Yozora said, seemingly enjoying herself with that devilish smile of hers.

"Kh...!"

I had no choice.

I confessed what my test scores were to Yozora.

And Yozora, who heard my test scores, had this to say in response,

"Haha, it's no big deal, they say everyone has an off day every now and then."

She said it as though she were pitying me in that same condescending tone of voice I used a few moments ago as she lightly patted me on the shoulder.

Of course, her expression was full of triumph.

...Uwahh... D-damn this is irritatinggggggg...!!

"Hehe..."

Yozora saw me grinding my teeth, and let a true smile of joy leak onto her face, different from that malicious sneer she had on earlier.

As she did though,

"Ahhh! Hey, how did you guys do on your tests!?"

Sena was happily running towards us from behind.

Yozora's expression changed to one of extreme displeasure faster than you could imagine.

"...So-so."

"Well, obviously I got perfect scores on everything! Here, look! Aren't I amazing!?"

Yozora attempted to coldly ignore her, but Sena triumphantly announced her scores anyway, and then showed us the tests she grabbed out of her bag.

That's definitely amazing, alright... She seriously got a perfect score on everything...

"Yeah, yeah, you're so amazing," said Yozora in a monotone voice.

"Heheh, I know, right!?"

Sena made a smile, unaware she was being made fun of.

"So, how did you do!?"

"Normal."

"Your class had Math II, Japanese History, Oral English, Modern Japanese, and World History, right? What did you get on the Math II, Oral, and World History tests!?"

...Why does this girl know what subjects other classes were having too?

"...All less than 100."

Yozora quietly said, sounding incredibly annoyed.

"Ahaha! So I win in those three subjects!"

"...You sure do."

"Our class gets our Modern Japanese tests back tomorrow. Wanna bet on who did better!?"

"No."

"What did you get for Modern Japanese, Yozora!?"

"Who knows."

...Yozora got a perfect score on her Modern Japanese test, so she wouldn't lose even if they bet on it, but she still refused Sena anyway.

"Ehh~ Come on, tell me~! Let's make a bet on Modern Japanese ~!"

"No."

"Fine, I'll give you a five point handicap!"

"No."

Yozora looked even more irritated than before, despite the fact that she would have won for sure with the handicap.

"OK, then a ten point handicap! That's good enough, right!? As for the bet~ How about whoever loses has to lick the winner's feet!?"

"Die. Are you retarded?"

"T-then how about the loser has to call the winner 'My Lord' for a week!?"

"I refuse."

Sena started to get teary-eyed at Yozora, who was determined to ignore her to the bitter end.

"Ahh, come on! Fine, then nothing happens if I win, but if you win I'll call you 'My Lord' for a week!"

"I don't want you calling me 'My Lord'... I might reconsider if you change it to not talking to me for a week though."

"T-that'd be a little... OK, I'll call you 'My Lord' just for betting on the test with me!"

...That's not even a bet anymore.

"I'm fine. It wouldn't be fun comparing tests with you anyway."

Yozora made a swift turn away from Sena, and started quickly walking away.

Sena gave chase, half in tears at this point.

"Wai- Hold on, Yozoraaa! Don't say the same thing Tajima did when we were sitting next to each other in 9th grade~!"

"Now then, how about we show each other our tests, Tomo-chan. I'll count down from three, and then we both show ours at the same time. We'll do Modern Japanese first, OK~?"

"Ugu~ Don't start talking nonsense, show your test to me~"

On one hand we have Yozora, completely ignoring Sena while talking to her air friend as we walk down the hall, and on the other , Sena, desperately trying to get Yozora to go along with her idea.

"Three~ Two~ One~ Zero! Ahh~ I knew I'd never beat you in Modern Japanese, Tomo-chan~"

What, did Tomo-chan get more than 100 points on her test?

"O-OK, then I'll lick your feet! I'll make an exception and lick your feet for you, so let's bet on the test, OK? You'll bet with me, right!?"

"Alright, next is World History."

"Here, look, look! It's my World History test! One hundred points! Aren't I amazing!?"

"Wow~ You got 90 points, Tomo-chan? That's amazing~ Me? I just got lucky, that's all~"

"Uuu~..."

...Hmm, how should I put this.

I guess these two are the same as ever, even in the new semester .

Butler

Today was our third day of the new semester.

I was on my way to the clubroom, as usual, when I spotted a butler.

"Excellent work today, Aniki."

It was Yukimura.

Yukimura, who was wearing the same kind of butler uniform that Stella, the steward of the Kashiwazaki family, wore, was standing in front of the coffee pot with an expressionless face.

Yukimura hadn't changed much at school ever since we found out she was actually a girl.

She seemed to still be going about her daily routine as a guy, and kept on bringing me bread and yankee manga at lunch.

However, I got the feeling that the distance between us ——in a literal, not emotional sense—— had gotten smaller.

To put it in concrete terms, we'd been touching each other fairly often.

Like, she'll touch my hand with the tips of her fingers for a while after handing me my bread, or when she comes to get me in class, she'll come pull on my clothes instead of calling out to me.

Also, up until now she'd always maintain her position of spacing out in front of the coffee pot when we were all lazing around in the clubroom, but now, whenever I'm in there she'll move closer to me.

It's like a little puppy's gotten attached to me, or maybe I should say it's more like I just got **yet another** little sister. It makes me feel kind of awkward, but I wouldn't say it's a bad feeling either.

After greeting me upon my entrance to the clubroom, Yukimura lifted up the hem of her butler uniform, and gave me a bow the same way she does in her maid uniform before slowly walking over to me.

"Um... What's with those clothes..."

I asked, taken aback by the whole situation.

Honestly, that butler uniform looked pretty good on her. Maybe it's because she's been wearing men's clothes for so long.

There's also the fact that I met Stella before too, so for me personally, seeing a girl dressed as a butler didn't feel all that out of place.

However, I'm not sure what it is, but it's like, seeing the girl who used to always wear a frilly maid outfit change into a more dignified butler uniform all of a sudden has a... certain freshness to it.

"Aniki, what do you think of it?"

Yukimura tilted her neck ever so slightly as she stood in front of me with her cheeks dyed a shade of red.

"W-well, umm, it looks good on you."

"Thank you very much, Aniki."

The corners of Yukimura's mouth formed a faint smile after I gave my quick answer.

As for me, I found myself captivated by her and her smile.

I almost started telling myself "He's a guy. He's a guy. He's a guy." by reflex, but I quickly yelled "No, wait, she's a girl, not a guy! There's nothing wrong with being captivated by a pretty girl's tender smile!" at myself inside my head.

...I hope I get used to this soon, it's really tiring having to yell at myself.

"So, why are you wearing a butler uniform?"

I asked again, to which she replied,

"I received it from Yozora-anego."

"From Yozora?"

Aside from Yukimura, Yozora, Sena, and Rika had also come to the clubroom.

I looked over at Yozora, who was reading a book on the sofa as usual, and she must've been looking at me before, because our eyes met.

Yozora started darting her eyes around for some reason.

"Yozora?"

I asked, causing Yozora to go "ahem" as though she were trying to quickly change the subject, before she then said in a casual tone of voice,

"——It's training to get closer to being a true man, version two."

"Training to get closer to being a true man, version two?"

I asked, repeating what Yozora's said.

"The reason Yukimura had been wearing the maid uniform up until now was because only a true man can have the manliness within their soul come bursting out despite wearing women's clothes. However, Yukimura was still far too inexperienced as a man. It was too soon for her to train herself by wearing cute clothes."

"I am ashamed to say it is true."

Yukimura made a meek expression on her face in response to Yozora's ridiculous statement.

"Hence, rather than try to restrain her manliness with a maid uniform, first she needs to learn how to act like a true man by wearing manly clothes. It's like that saying, 'start with appearances .'"

"I have much to learn, but I shall persevere in my studies."

"No no no, experience has nothing to do with it, Yukimura's a girl, isn't she!?"

In response to my retort, Yukimura said, in a calm, yet strangely passionate voice,

"Yozora-anego told me as thus: A true man is an existence that goes beyond mere gender."

Ehhhh.

"That's exactly right, Yukimura."

Yozora looked satisfied as she deeply nodded her head up and down.

"The manliness in a true man's soul can burst out, even in women's clothes—— in other words, a true man is defined by what lies in their soul. If one has the soul of a true man, then even if they wear women's clothes, **or even if they're women biologically**, then that individual can become a true man—— in

fact, I would go so far as to say that one who has overcome the great barrier known as gender is an existence far more deserving of being called a "true man" than any other!"

"Ehhh..."

I was simply dumbfounded, but Yukimura's face was sparkling in reaction to Yozora's speech.

"That was splendid, Yozora-anego. I hope to one day possess the handsomeness of man despite being a woman by birth, just as you have."

"Eh? Ah... Uh-huh... I see."

Yozora made a complex look on her face in response to Yukimura's gaze of admiration.

...I guess even Yukimura thinks Yozora looks like a pretty boy with her hair cut like that.

"Please watch over me, Aniki. I shall, without fail, become a true man just as you have."

"Ehhh..."

I was hoping she'd stop putting so much effort into all this weird stuff now that she finally realized what gender she is, but I couldn't say anything to those sparkling eyes of hers as she told me about her goal.

Everyone has the right to choose what kind of person they want to be...

"...I get how determined Yukimura is. I get it, but... why the butler uniform?"

"Because, a butler's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of someone who can get things done, right?"

...I wonder if Yozora, Sena, and Rika would mind not acting as if the stuff that's common sense to them is common sense to the rest of the world.

"...Is that how it is?"

I figured I'd ask for the hell of it, and Yozora confidently replied ,

"You know, butlers can do anything, and they're cool. They always support their master from the shadows, and command the rest of the house staff in taking care of every little thing. Everything they do has a purpose, and they'd use their own bodies to shield their masters from danger if necessary. They're also masters of many styles of combat, such as boxing and judo, placing them on a level far above any hoodlums or thieves. They also used to be famous mercenaries in the underworld, and are often skilled in assassination techniques involving steel thread. The occupation

of butler is one that can be called the symbol of what it means to be a true man. They are fit to be called the few remaining samurai in the modern world."

...What manga did she steal that from?

"I, too, shall endeavor to attain the manliness of a butler."

"Yes, strive for it, Yukimura. Although you only mimic them in appearance for now, a butler is still the perfect example. I suspect the inherent manliness found within a butler uniform is able to affect its wearer as well."

"Understood."

Yozora made a satisfied nod at Yukimura, who clenched her fist tight, renewing her determination.

Right as she did, Sena, who'd been playing some handheld game, opened her mouth.

"Girls in butler clothes are so cute, aren't they~?"

"...C-cute... you say?"

Yozora raised one of her eyebrows.

Rika then stopped messing with her laptop, and voiced her agreement with Sena.

"That's right~ Pretty girl butlers have been popular lately too."

"...Pretty girl... butlers...?"

The "?" above Yozora's head got bigger and bigger.

"Oh, you mean from that one series, right? Mebaru Kokonoe from 'Chicken Butler and Mayonnaise' right?"

"It certainly is true that ChikiMayo's Mebaru-chan is the most popular pretty girl butler right now~ Apparently it got an anime too."

"W-what? What's this Chicken Butler or whatever?"

"A galge." "An eroge."

Sena and Rika both answered simultaneously.

"Wha...!?"

Yozora was speechless.

"The way Mebaru-chan always acts so cold, but is actually a little clumsy and has lots of little weak points is so cute, isn't it~♥?"

"I find her naturally erotic conduct to be wonderful as well. The way she gets covered in mayonnaise at every opportunity must have not only the protagonist, but everyone else thinking 'Oh? This chick totally wants some action, gehehe.' too."

"Mebaru-chan really is cute, isn't she~...♥"

"She's totally moe!"

"I wanna cover Mebaru-chan in mayonnaise and lick it all off~"

"Uh, Rika wouldn't go that far..."

Yozora had a dumbstruck look on her face as she watched Rika and Sena excitedly discuss their eroge.

"S-so basically this 'Mebaru-chan' pretty girl character wears a butler uniform?"

"Well yeah, she's the main character's butler."

"Why is such an incompetent woman working as a butler?"

"Haa!? Mebaru-chan isn't incompetent! She might be a bit clumsy and really shy, but she always gives it her best!"

Sena said in protest to the insults directed at one of the eroge characters she likes.

"That's what I'd call incompetent... Besides, why is a woman working as a butler!? Isn't being a butler something only handsome guys do!?"

"Ehh? Anyone can be a butler. Just look at Stella, she works at our house."

"Isn't Stella a total hottie!?" said Rika.

"That individual was indeed quite refined."

Yukimura nodded in agreement.

"Stella...?"

Yozora raised an eyebrow.

"Ahh, that's right, you never met her... She's a steward who works at Sena's place, and she... umm... came to pick us up after that summer festival."

"...Oh. That day."

Yozora made an irritated frown.

Yozora went home right after getting her hair burned by the fireworks, but Rika, Yukimura, and Maria saw her for little bit that day.

I bet if Yozora had met Stella, she wouldn't have assumed that only men could be butlers.

"B-but—— That Stella person is a capable woman, right? It's still weird for an incapable woman to wear a butler uniform, isn't it!?"

"Well yeah, she might not be a very conventional butler, but that's what makes her so good! It makes her moe!" insisted Sena.

"M-moe...!? By moe you mean like, maids and cat ears and stuff, right? Like that stuff where they have girls go 'meow meow' and flirt with you."

"That *is* a kind of moe, but it's not the only kind there is. There's lots of different types of moe out there, Senpai."

Sena nodded in agreement with what Rika said.

"Wh... at..."

"There's always been a strong fanbase for pretty girls in men's clothes, but butlers are particularly popular right now. You have pretty good sense to think of having Yukimura wear a butler uniform without even being aware of that, Yozora-senpai."

"......!"

Yozora was again lost for words in response to Rika's casual appraisal.

Yozora then looked over at Yukimura, and after slowly shifting her gaze around as though she were studying her——

"Y-you're right... now that I look at her again... she's cute! She looks really good in it!"

Yozora said, in a frustrated tone of voice for some reason, with her cheeks twitching.

Yukimura simply tilted her head to the side, looking confused.

".....Damn it, I messed up, again..."

Yozora quietly mumbled something under her breath.

"...Yozora?"

"......Haa....."

Yozora let out a deep sigh and then flopped back down on the sofa.

Yukimura then said to Yozora,

"I do not fully understand, but I shall work to the best of my abilities to serve Aniki using the clothes I received from you, Anego."

She then put her hand to her chest, and gave a deep bow.

She did look a little awkward doing it, but she was definitely cute enough to make me see why pretty girl butlers would be popular.

Welcome to the World of Otomege

I went to the clubroom after school, and found Yozora, Sena, Yukimura, and Rika inside, doing as they pleased.

By the way, apparently Kobato's grades on her finals were a little, you know, and she hasn't been coming to club lately because she has to take supplementary classes to make up for it.

Maria's apparently busy getting used by Kate to help with all the new semester stuff, so she hasn't been here much either.

Hence, lately it's just been the five of us carrying out our club activities.

However it should go without saying that although I say club activities, that doesn't mean we do anything we all decided on. Rather, everyone just gathers in the clubroom and kills time doing whatever they want.

Yozora reads her books. Sena plays her games.

Ever since Yukimura got that butler uniform she's been doing... I don't even know... kenpo...?

She stands in front of the coffee pot, and makes slow movements as she does some exercises that look like the Eight Extremities Fist or something.

Most of the time she moves slow, but once in a while she'll make a fast punch too.

I get the feeling I've seen what she's doing somewhere before...

"Ah. Aniki."

Yukimura stopped her mysterious exercises after noticing I'd entered the room, and made a light jog over to me.

"Yo'. Hey, Yukimura... What was that exercise you were doing just now?"

"Training."

"Training...?"

"Yes."

A smile rose to Yukimura's face that was nearly identical to the usual spaced out, expressionless look she had.

"As a butler, I must train myself in the military arts so that I will be able to protect you, Aniki."

"So that's why you're doing kenpo, huh?"

"Yes. I considered many options, and decided to first master the 'Dark Snake Fist'."

"Dark Snake Fist...? ——Wait, that's from 'The Legend of the Strongest Punk'!"

"Yes." Yukimura nodded.

The "Dark Snake Fist" is a made-up form of kenpo that appears in the yankee manga series "The Legend of the Strongest Punk".

Its user, Golbez Ryuuzouji, started out as an enemy of the protagonist, Godaigo Onigawara, but eventually became his friend after many battles, and is now one of his most trusted allies, as well as being a popular character.

"I shall master the Dark Snake Fist so that I, too, may be a man like Golbez, capable of aiding you, Aniki."

"I see... Well, give it your best shot."

"I will."

In any case, having her move around should at least be a little better than just standing in one spot spacing out all the time.

...The Dark Snake Fist includes techniques that "Increase the user's abilities to 50 times their normal levels using an explosion of the dark fighting spirit within" and "Convert the user's dark fighting spirit into the form of a dragon to fire at the enemy" and other similar stuff, but it's a mystery to me how she plans to master any of those.

"Yukimura... guys like you are meant to stay thin, please don't get all muscular on me, ok..."

Rika, who was playing games on her console, said with a slightly troubled look on her face as she looked over at us.

"A guy?"

I thought I might've just heard her wrong, so I asked to make sure.

"Ah, I'm so used to seeing her as a guy that it's hard to switch all of a sudden~ I don't really get it, but she wants to be more like a guy and all, so I was thinking I'd just keep treating her like a guy."

"I would be glad to have you do so, Ms. Rika."

Yukimura had a tinge of happiness in her voice as she said that.

My eyes then drifted towards the TV Rika was using to play her game.

The TV has only been used for playing games ever since Sena brought it here, and since Sena and Rika are generally the only members of the Neighbors Club that play games, they both take turns using it.

The game Rika's playing right now has a screen that looks a lot like the screen on most of the galge Sena usually plays, with the top half of a character displayed in the middle of the screen, and the lines being said along with the name of the character saying them written in a window on the bottom.

However, the character being displayed was not a pretty girl, but rather a delicate-looking pretty young boy with black hair.

"Is that one of those boys love games?"

I figured I might as well ask, and Rika replied with a "Yes." along with a nod.

I then took notice of the large stack of game cases next to the PS2 she was currently playing.

There have to be at least 20 or so in that stack.

"You've sure got a lot, don't you..."

I said, in a voice mixed with amazement.

"They're my leftover games from the ones that mostly went on sale between July and September. Rika's generally the type to clear a game right after she buys it, but I haven't had time since we did that training camp, the amusement park, and all that stuff, so my number of stock-games has gotten quite big. I've got about the same number of games to play for PC too."

"...Stock-games?"

I can't say I've ever really heard that word before.

"It means games that you bought, but never got around to playing, always telling yourself you'd get to it eventually."

"...So it's like stock-books then?" Yozora quietly said.

"Stock-books?"

"Basically the book version of stock-games. They're books you bought, but then piled up because you never read them. I've got about 30 stock-books myself."

"There's also stock-DVDs, stock-CDs, stock-eroge, stock-plastic models, and tons more. It wouldn't be an overstatement to say there are as many stock-somethings as there are hobbies."

"Why can't you just buy a new one after you finish an old one..."

"Heh..."

I thought I had a good point, but Rika let out a sigh with a distant look in her eyes.

"...The world is not so kind, Kodaka-senpai. Specifically, I'm talking about stuff like limited first editions, limited first editions, and limited first editions. There's also things where you put off buying them, and then they're sold out before you know it with no plans for more copies to be made..."

Yozora added,

"That happens with books sometimes too... You don't buy right away and then they sell out, forcing you to wait for weeks on end until they can make a reprint... It's not so bad as long as they actually made a reprint like they should, but sometimes things go out of print, or a publishing company goes bankrupt..."

"And when you're dealing with light novels that have lots of volumes, the "bad initial sales → discontinued" combo is quite scary as well."

I can kind of see what she means with the light novel example.

I wonder what ever happened to the continuation of that light novel I got with the on its cover...

"That's why you've gotta buy the things you want when you can—— that's simply the logic of our world. It's much better to have bought and regret, than to have never bought at all."

"You're like the model customer."

I was kind of surprised at how serious she took this, but I was fairly serious in complimenting her. Rika then started breathing wildly through her nose and nodded at my words.

"That is exactly right! If every gamer was like Rika, then that studio, and that studio, and that studio wouldn't have had to go bankrupt... They were good games... They were good games I tell youuuuuuuuu...!!"

Rika had broken down in tears.

I'm guessing she has a lot of sad memories about this stuff.

"Haa... Although, I suppose it's as you say, Kodaka-senpai. Just leaving the games that I went and bought to pile up unplayed would be a waste, so for now, I think I'll go all out and clear them

all this week. It's not like I have anything else to do when classes are in session anyway."

Rika said, lifting her face up.

That was a statement very befitting of a student who goes straight to the Rika room everyday instead of class.

"Still, this much in three months, huh... There must be a lot of BL games that come out."

After I'd said that, having seen the tower of games,

"Ah, that's not it. It's true that right now Rika is playing a boys love game, but there are normal RPGs, shooters, and otomege in there as well."

Rika grabbed the game case on the top of the stack.

It was the latest installment of a pretty famous RPG that I knew the name of.

"What do you mean by... otomege?"

Yozora squinted her eyes in suspicion of Rika.

"Basically, otomege are galge aimed at women."

"...? That's different than BL?"

"BL games and otome games are different genres, Yozora-senpai. In a BL game, both the protagonist and characters

you go after are boys, but in an otomege, it's a girl going after a cast of boys."

Said Rika while holding out a game for Yozora to see.

Yozora got up off the sofa, walked towards Rika, and grabbed the game from her.

Yozora's expression turned to stone the instant she saw the cover of the game.

"T-this title... That accursed Semoponume...!"

"...?"

I looked at the game, thinking Yozora's reaction was weird, and saw that there were several pretty boys in school uniforms drawn on the cover.

The title was—— "Tokimeite Memory Days - Girls Version 4"

"...This is related to that 'Tokimemo' series of games, is it not?"

"Oh? You know about 'Tokimemo' Yozora-senpai?"

Rika made a slightly surprised look on her face.

"We all played 'Tokimemo 7' one time before you joined."

Back then, Sena burst into tears after the heroine started to hate her, and Yozora got incredibly pissed off before going off somewhere. The whole thing turned into a total mess...

"Why did you all play a galge toge—— Well, anyway, I shouldn't have to explain much if you've already played the guy's version. As you guessed, this is the otomege version of 'Tokimeite Memory Days'. The game system is mostly identical too. Tokimemo Girls Version, GirlMemo for short, just swaps the characters' genders around."

"...Hmph. So there are all kinds of games out there."

Yozora handed the 'GirlMemo' case back to Rika with a look of displeasure on her face.

"You don't seem to be very interested in it, Yozora-senpai."

"That's right, I'm not. It's from the same series as that shit game. It's probably just as shitty as the other one was."

"Wh...!?" Rika was speechless.

"I'm not letting that slide! Did you just call Tokimemo a shit game!?"

Sena flew up out of her seat in a rage.

"...W-what's your problem?"

Yozora faltered slightly in the face of Sena's and Rika's angry looks.

"Calling the great 'GirlMemo' series ——which is even more brilliant than the guy's version, and has already captured the

hearts of over 700,000 young maidens—— a shit game before even playing it is not something I can forgive, even if it's coming from you, Yozora-senpai...!"

Rika looked like she was honestly mad about something for once.

"I don't have any interest in getting along with a bunch of guys, so I've never played 'GirlMemo' before, but... hearing someone diss a game that's like Tokimemo's little sister pisses me off. Dissing ' GirlMemo' is like dissing my own little sister—— it's the same as dissing Kobato-chan!"

"Like hell it's the same, you're not related to Kobato at all!"

Sena completely ignored my spontaneous retort.

The way Sena's been seriously acting like Kobato is her own little sister lately is scary... She's not just 'like a little sister' to her anymore.

"...Well, I can't say that I like judging something without knowing what it's all about either."

"You too, Kodaka..."

Yozora pursed her lips as though she were pouting.

"...Fine. Then I'll call it shit after I've played it. Happy now?"

So it's a given it'll be shit, is it?

"Rika has no problems with that. Hehehe... After all, I'm sure Yozora-senpai will be captivated by the charms of 'GirlMemo' after playing it, too."

"I agree that you should actually give it a try first. Although, even if you don't like it after playing through it, I'll still slaughter anyone who badmouths 'Tokimemo' or 'GirlMemo'!"

Sena has her fair share of personality problems too.

And so, Yozora began playing "GirlMemo".

She sat in front of the TV with an irritated look on her face, and grabbed the PS2 controller.

Sena and Rika were there sitting beside her.

Yukimura and I were basically watching her play from behind.

When she started up the game, the same logo as the maker of " Tokimemo" came up on screen, and the opening animation started to play, but...

"How boring."

Yozora hit the start button and skipped right past it.

"Hey!—— Why'd you skip the opening!?"

Sena raised her voice in complaint.

...I'm pretty sure she did the exact same thing when we played Tokimemo, saying that it was "in the way."

"The opening is the face of any work! They usually get played a lot in store windows, which means their quality can have a huge impact on the overall sales of the game! That's why every single maker puts a ton of effort into the opening! You've got some nerve to skip right past the crystallization of the staff's hard work without having ever watched it!"

"Hmph, having a pretty face is pointless if the insides are awful. "

"That's n——"

Sena looked like she was about to object, but made a face like she just realized something, and then said, after staring at Yozora for a second,

"...You've got a point. What matters is what's on the inside, not the outside," said Sena in an earnest tone.

"...What you just thought in your head applies to you, not me."

Yozora glared at Sena with a half-opened eye.

Anyway, Yozora selected the new game option once the title screen came up, and got to the part where she had to pick the protagonist's name.

"Hrm... What should I do for the name..."

"It's common practice to use your own name in the Tokimemo series, Senpai."

Yozora frowned as though worrying about something.

"But the protagonist is a bitch who tries to get her hands on several men, isn't she? How could I use my name for someone like that... I'd prefer not to, but I guess I'll go with Meat's name..."

"How am I a bitch!? You're the one playing, so use your own name!"

"Well, playing the bitch and trying to go after several guys at once *is* fun, but generally you just go after one guy the whole game . Part of the fun of GirlMemo is the ability to for the player to make their character a pure one or a bitch."

"...Hmph... If that's how it is, then..."

Yozora entered "Mikadzuki" into the last name field.

She then moved on to the first name field, but right as she moused over "yo"...

"Take that!"

Sena ripped the controller out of Yozora's hands, entered some nonsense for her name, and hit the start button.

"Wha...!?"

"Ahahaha~ 'Yohechiborake'! Your name is Yohechiborake! What a fittingly stupid name for you! This is payback for what you did when we played Tokimemo! Now we're even!"

Sena gleefully boasted about her triumph.

Wow, was she still upset about that Semoponume thing?

"...Sena-senpai, why would you do that?"

Rika said, in a cold voice devoid of any emotion.

"...Eh?"

Sena was petrified with a smile still on her face.

Rika stared over at Sena, completely expressionless.

"Why would you do something so meaningless? Rika has no idea what you were thinking."

"U-umm..."

Sena started breaking out into a cold sweat.

"Sena-senpai?"

Rika tilted her head slightly, still expressionless.

"B-because, Yozora did it to me bef-..."

"Sena-senpai, you agree that one should use their real name in order to fully enjoy the charms of this game, do you not? I finally got a chance to enlighten Yozora-senpai on the wonders of otomege, so why did you feel to need to try and ruin it? Well?"

S-scaryyyyy...

Having someone calmly question you like that is more powerful than them yelling at you.

"Uuuu..."

Sena started to get teary-eyed.

"B-but Yozora-..."

Sena took a quick glance over at Yozora.

"Yozora what?"

Yozora, who was sitting in-between Sena and Rika, was staring at the screen in a cold sweat with her expression frozen in place.

"Uuuu... I'm sorryyy..."

Sena let her shoulders droop, and then handed the controller back to Yozora.

"You're sorry? Who are you apologizing to? Rika was only asking why you did what you did because she had absolutely no idea why you would ever do something like that."

"...Hyuuuu..."

"W-well, Meat's an idiot; this is normal for her... You don't have to get so mad, Rika..."

Yozora did the unexpected and actually covered for Sena, who was about to burst into tears, by trying to calm Rika down.

"If you say so, Yozora-senpai. Now then, let's try this again, starting with the name."

"S-sure..."

Yozora still had a stiff look on her face as she went back to the name input screen, erased the previously entered "Yohechiborake" and changed it to "Yozora".

Sena didn't do anything to get in the way this time.

She then continued, entering her birthday and blood type, and then moved on to setting up her nickname.

"A nickname..."

Yozora put the cursor over "so", and hesitated for a few seconds before moving away from it and entering "YOZORA" in all caps.

Thus, the game finally began.

A school gate with flower petals from cherry blossoms dancing around was displayed on screen, and the protagonist's monologue began in the message window.

Hnnn! Ah, that spring breeze feels great!

My name is Yozora Mikadzuki! It's my first day as a freshman at Tokimeki High School!

I'm just a normal girl you can find anywhere, but I hope I can have a fun three years here.

It was with a chest filled with those hopes, that I then passed through the school gate, covered in a blizzard of cherry blossoms .

...What is this... extremely awkward feeling...!?

"Spring breeze she says! Bft!"

Sena looked at the screen, and let out a stifled laugh.

"A-and, a che- pft! A chest, full of- full of, pftt...! Like you could fit anything in that chest of yours! Gyahahaha!!"

Sena looked like she was about to start rolling on the ground any second now as she exploded with laughter.

I looked at Yozora, and saw she was red up to her ears, facing down towards the ground as her body shook.

I do have to agree that "Passing through the school gate with a chest full of hopes for a fun school life while enjoying the fresh spring breeze" is not something that fits Yozora's character at all.

Passing through the school gate while cursing the students around her excited for the start of a new day would be much more Yozora-like.

"Fgh..."

Crap, I'm about to start laughing too.

"Ahahahaha- Hey, Yozora! Your nickname can be 'Spring Breeze' from now on!"

Thwack!

Yozora whacked Sena in the face with a flyswatter she drudged up from somewhere.

"Oww! W-what'd you do that for, Spring Breeze!? Spring Breeze ! S, pr, ing, Bree, ze!"

Sena didn't stop teasing Yozora, even with tears in the corners of her eyes.

"Kh! I'll kill it! I'll kill this piece of meat!"

"Now now, please calm down, Yozora-senpai. You'll get used to it eventually."

"Ghhh...!"

After being soothed by Rika, Yozora reluctantly sat down and faced the game screen again, hitting the next message button with a trembling finger.

The instant after Spring Breeze... I mean, the protagonist, " Yozora", passed through the gate, someone bumped into her, causing her to fall on her butt.

Yozora "Ouchies~! Goodness, what was that!?"

"Gooodneeeessss~ whaaaat~ waaaas~ thaaaat!? Ouchieeeeeess!! Good- Goodne- Good, ness! Geyahahaha!!"

That must've been another bullseye for her, because Sena burst into laughter, yet again. Yozora, on the other hand, kept going through the text, audibly grinding her teeth all the while.

The screen changed from a typical background to an event CG (a picture specially drawn for a specific scene) that showed "Yozora " on her butt, with a blond haired pretty boy offering his hand to her.

?? "Sorry, I wasn't paying attention. Can you stand up?"

The pretty boy had a beautiful voice befitting his handsome features.

"Yozora" took his hand, and stood up.

The handsome guy then apologized profusely for bumping into "Yozora" before introducing himself.

His name is Ouji Sasanomori.

Apparently he's a new transfer student to the school, same as the protagonist.

The protagonist offered her own simple introduction, and told the handsome guy, Ouji, in a gentle voice, "I hope we can both have wonderful high school lives!" before parting with him.

Yozora "He was so cool. I can't believe I got to meet someone like him right after coming here... I get the feeling my high school life is going to be just peachy!"

"Things are going to be juuu~st peachy~!"

Yelled Sena as the table went bang bang every time she hit it.

"Ghhhh...!"

Yozora's cheeks went beet red again, and she looked down at the ground with a face that looked like she was about to cry.

"Ahahaha! Yozora, your nickname can be 'Peachy' from now on! "

"Guahhhhhhh!!"

Yozora roared, and then smacked Sena on the head with her flyswatter.

"Ahh, I can't take this anymore! I'm not this kind of happy-go-lucky woman! I'm going to change it back to ' Yohechiborake'!!"

"N-now now, please calm down Yozora-senpai. This is just a game. She's not the same as the real Yozora-senpai..."

Rika went to pacify Yozora again, and after a few deep breaths, Yozora finally calmed down again.

...I do agree that using your own name lets you empathize with the character more, but I only just now realized how embarrassing playing a galge using your own name in front of other people is.

I stopped seeing it as something odd because of how Sena plays her own galge in here now and then.

Anyway, Yozora continued the game, trembling from the disgrace.

After the graduation ceremony ended, her homeroom began.

The game moved to a scene where everyone was introducing themselves, and it was revealed that Ouji Sasanomori was in the same class.

After homeroom had ended, Sasanomori came to talk to " Yozora", and the first choice in the game came up in the middle of a conversation with him about how happy he was to be in the same class.

▼1. "I'm glad to see you too, Ouji!"

2. "I'm glad to see you too, Sasanomori."

3. "....."

It should go without saying which choice Yozora went with.

Ouji "Haha, quite the shy one, aren't you?"

Sasanomori walked away, apparently not offended in the least.

Sasanomori really knows what he's doing...

After Sasanomori left, this time it was a girl who came to talk to "Yozora".

?? "Hey~ hey~, you know Sasanomori?"

Her name is Youko Fuyuki, and apparently she sits next to Yozora.

She had light brown hair, and looked like a refined, cheerful person.

According to Youko, Sasanomori is the son of a wealthy CEO, in addition to being popular with all the girls.

"Yozora" then continued talking with Youko, even after their little chat about Sasanomori had ended.

".....When does the option to tell this woman to go die come up? "

The real Yozora wore an irritated look on her face as she stared at the screen.

"How can you say that!? She's such a nice girl!"

"I can't trust her... There's always another side to the kind of women who go and talk to people they don't even know all of a sudden. She's got the same bitch smell Akari Fujibayashi had."

"Hey! Akari is a great girl, got that!?"

Sena raised her voice in protest to Yozora's claim.

However, in the end, the choice Yozora was hoping for never showed up (obviously).

Youko "I hope we get along from now on, YOZORA!"

Yozora "Yeah, me too!"

I guess when they write "YOZORA" in all caps that means they're calling her by her nickname.

Thus, "Yozora" and Youko became friends.

Incidentally, you can apparently ask Youko to use her connections in the newspaper club to get info on a guy you're interested in.

"They're already friends on the first day of school? Even if this is a game, don't you think they should try to at least be a *little* realistic?"

Sena said with a completely serious face.

I have to agree with her too.

"You've got a point, that is a little bit too unrealistic. It's not like this is some sci-fi or fantasy story either."

...No, wait. Maybe you need to be able to make friends on the first day of school like a game protagonist in order to live your life as a normal.

"...She'll betray me... I just know that woman is going to betray me later..."

Yozora murmured, as if trying to convince herself what she was saying was true.

Anyway, that's more or less how the first day of school event ended.

Up until now was basically like the prologue, and the real game starts on the next day.

The game screen changed to the protagonist's room, where the protagonist's stats and available actions were displayed.

The room had a kind of girly feel to it, and aside from the names of the parameters and actions, it looked the same as Tokimemo.

The game system also looked to be nearly identical. You can study, exercise, etc. in order to raise your stats and get closer to being the kind of girl the guy you're after likes, and then go on dates in order to raise your affection level.

"...What a hopelessly pathetic woman. I can't possibly imagine being the same person as her."

Yozora criticized "Yozora"'s base parameters, clearly irritated.

The protagonist in GirlMemo has six stats: Academics, Athletics , Arts, Charm, Sociability, and Physical Strength, but seeing as how "Yozora" was at the start of the game, her stats were all 10~20 just like Semoponume Kashiwazaki's were in Tokimemo.

"Hmph... Guess I'll do Academics for now."

Yozora chose "studying" as the thing her character would focus on for the next week.

The screen then changed to an animation of a girl drawn in a cartoonish style (most likely "Yozora") sitting in the library flipping through some books as her "Academics" stat went up.

"Hehehe, guess that's all a small fry can do."

"Silence, Semoponume."

Yozora continued having "Yozora" study while slinging insults at Sena.

Aside from taking the minimum amount of breaks needed to restore her Physical Strength (apparently if it gets too low you get sick and can't move), all "Yozora" did was study, and her Academics stat quickly went past 100.

Right as it did, the game screen changed its background image to that of inside the library.

Apparently she's having trouble with a hard problem that showed up.

Yozora "Uuu~... This one's a toughie..."

"Kh... you goddamn imbecile! How can you hope to ever do anything on your own if you can't even handle some simple problems from your first semester as a freshman!? *I* never had to study this much as a freshman, you damn moron! Go for it! If you really are me, then you should be able to do it no problem!"

Yozora gave a pep talk to her virtual self, but obviously the " Yozora" inside the game couldn't hear her.

As "Yozora" was moaning about the problem in the library,

?? "You look like you could use a hand. Would you like me to show you how to do it?"

The boy who called out to her looked quite handsome, and had glasses on that gave the impression he took his studies seriously.

"The glasses boy is here ohmygoddddddd!"

Rika let out a yell of joy for some unknown reason.

"Ehh? Is this the GirlMemo version of Yukiko? He looks kinda boring, don't you think? Yukiko looks way smarter, and cuter," said Sena.

By the way, Yukiko—— Yukiko Nagata, is a girl who shows up in Tokimemo once your Academics stat is high enough, and was the first girl Yozora and Sena tried to go after back when we played Tokimemo.

"Yozora" looked confused after having someone call out to her all of a sudden, so the boy introduced himself.

His name is Touma Suzutsuki.

He comes to the library a lot because he likes it, but apparently he took an interest in "Yozora" after seeing her study so much.

"I-interested in me!? B-but we don't even know each other! I even thought he looked like a serious guy too, but he's actually just a shameless four-eyes!"

The real Yozora was taken aback as her cheeks went red.

"Yozora" explained in a monologue that Touma Suzutsuki gave a speech as the freshman representative at the entrance ceremony before.

Usually the person with the best grades does that, which means that this guy's probably the smartest out of all the freshmen.

"Hmph, even I've given an entrance ceremony speech! It's obvious that I'm way smarter than this guy!"

I have no idea why Sena felt the need to compete with him.

The conversation continued a short while before another choice popped up.

▼1. "Thank you, would you mind teaching me then?"

2. "You're in the way. Beat it."

...Yozora picked option 2 as though it were only natural for her.

I figured getting his sincere offer coldly rejected would piss him off, but surprisingly, Touma actually seemed impressed.

Touma "Insisting on solving the problem on your own is truly impressive. However, I still think relying on others once in a while is the logical thing to do. I'll be reading a book over there for a while, so just say something if you need me."

So Touma said before getting up and walking away.

W-what a perfect response... This guy's a real adult...

"So he's got a good personality on top of being good at studying ...? He's almost like a superhuman. Yozora, why don't you try to get this guy first?"

Upon hearing my suggestion of Touma, who was honestly charming even from a guy's point of view, Yozora made an upset face for some reason and shook her head.

"I don't need him. I'll do things on my own."

...The game screen went back to her room, where the text "You can now invite Touma Suzutsuki on a date." was written in the message window on the bottom.

"...Tch, what a pain in the ass."

Yozora said, full of irritation as though spitting the words out.

"I might run into him if I keep going to the library, so I guess I'll do something else next week."

Yozora ended up selecting "Sports" from the list of activities.

The screen then changed to an animation of "Yozora" drawn in a cartoonish style running along the shore as her "Athletics" stat went up

The week after that, she chose "Drawing", which raised her " Arts" stat; following that, she picked "Fashion", which raised her " Charm" stat; and then the following week after that, she chose " Part-time Job", which raised her "Sociability" stat.

She continued on in that fashion, and each of her stats kept on increasing until they were finally all over 100.

Along the way, Yozora started to meet with a bunch of new characters.

There was the gentle baseball boy, Shuntarou Kasuga; the baby-faced art prodigy, Kei Endou; the charismatic model, Touya

Toudou; and the foreigner from the tea club who loves Japanese culture, Issac Ramsas. "Yozora" got to know each of these nearly flawless, handsome guys.

Every single one of them was attractive in terms of looks as well as personality, and they were all very courteous, worked hard towards their goals, were incredibly friendly, and were able to simply laugh off the cold attitude "Yozora" showed them.

No high school boy like this exists! ...I lost count of how many times I wanted to yell that out, but somehow I managed to hold it in.

I mean, I guess it's not totally impossible for them to exist.

Hell, maybe all guys are nice, cheerful, and generous like them, and I just don't know about it because I have no friends.

I wonder if I could make friends if I was a charming guy like them...

I know it's a long ways away, but I told myself I'd do my best to be like them all the same.

Anyway, let's put that aside for now.

Although "Yozora" had gotten to know a bunch of handsome guys, not once had she ever invited any of them on a date, instead focusing on improving herself.

Once in a while the guys would invite her to walk home together, or go shopping together, or something similar, but Yozora always picked the harshest way to refuse them.

As a result of spending every week, weekend, and holiday improving her own skills, "Yozora" surpassed Touma on their finals and became top of the freshman class, was named MVP at the athletics festival, had a picture she drew in art class win the grand prize in a prefectural contest, and came in first place at the cultural festival's beauty pageant. Basically, she turned into some kind of perfect superhuman.

"Alright! Now this is more like me!"

Yozora nodded full of satisfaction while "Yozora" looked back on her school life thus far on the night of the last day of her spring break.

"Yeah, but you don't ever talk to anyone..."

I mumbled in a soft voice.

In the guy's version of Tokimemo, if you don't act nice to the girls you know and do stuff with them, they get upset and spread bad rumors about you around school, causing your affection level with everyone to plummet. However, things are a bit easier in GirlMemo, because as long as your affection level with any one guy isn't above a certain point, they won't get upset even if you treat them harshly. I guess it makes sense too; you wouldn't care if a person you don't like doesn't like you.

Thus, there were no bad rumors about "Yozora" the entire year.

In other words... While on one hand she worked to become a magnificent superhuman, on the other, she didn't get any closer to any of the guys.

In fact, in the instruction manual it says that "If you haven't made much progress with any of the guys around Christmas and New Year's, you'll end up spending the holidays with only the girls! (>_<)," but in spite of that, not even her friend Youko Fuyuki invited her to a Christmas party or New Year's shrine visit.

Apparently Youko has her own affection level too, and when it gets too low she won't invite you do to stuff, and won't tell you about the guys anymore either.

Incidentally, the instruction manual also says, "Youko is a really nice girl, so you don't have to worry about her not liking you as long as you don't keep on picking weird choices when you talk to her! (^_^)"

So this is the result of constantly picking weird choices.

"Uuu... This protagonist's school life is so sad I can't even look...!"

"You even got the girls in a video game to hate you... You really are pathetic, Yozora..."

Rika and Sena both wore a look of pity on their faces.

Only Yukimura said, "You are very cool, Yozora-anego. You're just like Aniki," with a look of respect in her eyes.

"Hmph. Who cares about a bunch of guys like them. I'll become a normal all on my own."

After making her all too sad proclamation, Yozora saved the game and stopped playing for the day.

The next day after school, Yozora resumed playing GirlMemo.

The members present were the same five as the day before.

Even after becoming a junior, all "Yozora" did was strive to improve herself, becoming an isolated person who rejects contact with all other people in the process. She didn't even get invited to do anything by Youko or the handsome guys like she did when she was a freshman, and only the light "diiing" sound of her stats going up echoed in the clubroom.

"...This game's pretty boring..."

"You're the one who's making it boring! ——This isn't any different than how the real Yozora acts at school!"

Sena unleashed an intense retort to Yozora's dull statement as Yozora continued her simple job of choosing an activity and pressing the button to confirm her choice.

Yozora, the one playing the game, was bored, which made it even more boring for the rest of us who were just watching.

The days passed in the blink of an eye without so much as a single event happening, and after accomplishing the herculean feat of getting all 5's on her report card, the last day of the first semester arrived.

The game screen actually changed for once as an event began.

"Yozora" was jogging in the evening when she accidentally went a little too far into a more dangerous neighborhood, where she was surrounded by a few delinquents from the infamous Dokiun High School.

"Hmph, how incredibly foolish for trash like you to challenge me. My power level is 380! Die!"

Yozora yelled, full of passion, but as you'd expect of a lone girl (by the way, it's Athletics, not power level) all she could do was run away before eventually getting trapped in a dark alley.

"Kh! Why is there no choice to attack!? I'll show you my kick! Take this! I'll kick you to death!"

However, Yozora's shouting of dangerously bad ideas didn't reach "Yozora".

The delinquents slowly closed in on "Yozora" with vulgar grins on their faces.

Then, all of a sudden, one of the delinquents let out a scream and went flying.

?? "Tch, seeing scum like you seriously makes me wanna puke."

The owner of the deep voice who appeared from behind the delinquents was a villainous-looking silver haired boy with a sharp look in his eyes wearing an unkempt Tokimeki High School uniform.

The boy took out the delinquents who'd come to attack "Yozora" all of a sudden, while getting beat up himself.

When the protagonist went to name herself, he said,

?? "You're Yozora Mikadzuki, right? You're so famous even a guy like me's heard of you."

Apparently "Yozora" had gotten famous at her school after all the stuff she'd accomplished.

When the protagonist went on to ask about the delinquent-looking boy, he curtly replied "Eiji Nagatani," saying nothing other than his name before turning to walk away.

Eiji "This place ain't where an elite like you belongs. Get the heck outta here, got it?"

"Yozora" parted ways with Eiji, and returned to her room.

The text "You can now invite Eiji Nagatani on a date." was displayed in the message window.

Eiji Nagatani—— He had a more wild feel to him that didn't really fit the game compared to the gentlemen pretty boys who'd shown up until now.

"...Hmm... Maybe I'll invite Eiji Nagatani out..." Yozora said all of a sudden.

"I knew it. Those kinds of guys are your type, aren't they, Yozora-senpai?"

"N-no! I just figured I should play around a little bit instead of doing that boring manual labor all the time!"

Yozora denied Rika's question while blushing furiously.

"...Hmm, I think I'm actually pretty bad with those kinds of guys. His eyes are scary, he's really blunt, and he's completely unsociable too..."

"You be quiet!" "You're one to talk!" "Senpai, please be quiet!"

Yozora, Sena, and Rika all yelled at me in unison.

"Aniki, that was what they call 'slapstick' was it not? Even I was able to understand it."

Yukimura said in a happy tone of voice in the seat next to me.

No, it wasn't a joke... I mean, come on, delinquents and yankees and stuff are scary, right?

"By the way, Rika doesn't think people like Eiji are all that bad either, just so you know."

"Well, it's true he's probably better than a hot-headed idiot like Kasuga, a flirt like Toudou, a girly guy like Endou, or someone way too serious like Issac."

"He is, of course, no match for you Aniki, but I believe him to be a suitable candidate."

...Seems like everyone except me actually likes Eiji Nagatani for some reason.

Anyway, Yozora started going after the bad boy Eiji Nagatani.

To start with, she had "Yozora" call Youko for information on him, namely how to contact him.

By the way, this was also her first call to Youko.

Youko "I'll tell you his phone number, but don't call me anymore unless you have to..."

...She hates "Yozora" this much now? Wow is that sad...

"Hmph, as if I'd ever call you again anyway!"

Yozora said, as though spitting the words out, and then called Eiji with the number she got from Youko in order to set up their date.

"Hrm..."

The list of places to go on a date was displayed on screen, and Yozora's face went a little red as she stared at the screen in bewilderment.

"W... What would be a good place to go on a date...?"

"It's easy to get him to agree if you pick a place he likes, and you can raise his affection level easily that way too. Normally your friends would tell you about that stuff, but..." said Rika, trailing off at the end.

"Why not just go to the batting cages? Since delinquents like bats and all."

"Hmm, so you *can* think of good ideas once in a while, huh Meat... I suppose I'll go with that."

Yozora nodded in agreement to Sena's suggestion, and selected the batting cages for their date.

Thus, "Yozora" called Eiji, and asked him if he'd like to go to the batting cages next Sunday.

Eiji "Well, I guess we can go..."

Eiji sounded a little lost for words, but he still accepted the invitation.

And so, Sunday arrived.

The day of "Yozora"'s first date was finally here.

In GirlMemo, you can pick out what to wear as well as how to style your hair before a date, and apparently you can raise the guy's affection level more easily if you pick clothes he likes.

Yozora chose to wear a jersey and sneakers and kept her hair straight.

"Why are you wearing a jersey to your first date!?"

Rika yelled in a shocked voice.

"I don't want to wear some flashy stuff and have him think I'm all into this. I'm only out here with Eiji to kill some time, that's all. And besides, you're the last person I want to hear any complaints about what I wear from."

"Uu..."

Yozora coolly refuted Rika's protests, causing Rika (who always wears a lab coat over her uniform) to shut her mouth.

"Yozora" arrived at the place they agreed to meet, and Eiji came a few minutes late.

"Yozora" and Eiji then went to the batting cages and had a little competition.

"Yozora" managed to beat Eiji, probably because of her high Athletics stat.

Eiji "You're not half bad. I ain't gonna lose next time though."

Eiji seemed frustrated, but complimented "Yozora" all the same.

Eiji had an intimidating, yet gentle smile on his face as he said " Today was a lotta fun," before going home.

Looks like their first date together was a success.

"H-hmph... Fool, did you really think you could beat *me* at the batting cages...?"

Yozora said, insulting him, but despite that, the corners of her mouth were raised into a faint smile.

Yozora chose to go to the arcade for their next date.

As with the previous date, Yozora went with this choice based on Sena's obviously biased suggestion that, "delinquents all like to hang out at arcades, don't they?"

For this date, she was wearing a T-shirt and sweat pants, with her hair in a ponytail.

"Yozora" then went off to where they agreed to meet up, and Eiji arrived a little late again.

After a quick greeting from Eiji, he looked away and mumbled in a tiny voice,

Eiji "Different hairstyle this time, huh. Hmm..."

Yozora "Eh? Did you say something?"

Eiji "I-I didn't say anythin'. Come on, let's go already."

"Ohh? Not bad for a yankee like him to actually notice that."

Sena said, full of admiration.

"Haa... If only Kodaka-senpai were that observant... Haaaa~~"

Rika got depressed for some reason, and let out a huge sigh.

"O-observant about what?"

"I'm talking about a girl's hairstyle! Whenever a girl changes her hairstyle you're supposed to point it out—— and if you can, compliment it too! That's common sense! It's common sense!"

"I'm not sure you're in a position to talk about common sense... Ah, but I did tell Yozora her new haircut looked good on her when school started. Right, Yozora?"

"D-don't bring that up all of a sudden, you idiot!"

Yozora's face went beet red as she complained before promptly turning her back to me.

"You complimented Yozora-senpai's hairstyle...!? Ghhh...!"

Rika started groaning in frustration for some reason. I really don't get this girl.

"Ah, speaking of hairstyles, you're always changing yours. What's up with that?"

"!? Wha...!? Y-you noticed...!?"

I didn't have any special reason for saying what I did, but Rika's eyes were opened wide in shock for some reason.

"Noticed...? I'm not sure what you're getting at, but you've been changing your hairstyle a lot ever since you took off your glasses and let your hair down, right? I'm pretty sure you had your hair in

a side tail at the amusement park, and I think there was a day you had twintails too. There was also a day you braided your hair, a day you wore a headband, and when you put it back into a ponytail, you made it a little lower than before too... Ah, now that I think about it, the day before yesterday you had a red highlight in the middle of your hair too. Were you trying to copy some video game character or something?"

Incidentally, she currently has a part of her hair tied up on each side of her head in the so-called two-side up style.

She changes her hairstyle every now and then, so I started wondering if she just has a lot of free time or something.

"....."

Rika had a stupid look on her face, her mouth hanging wide open.

"Rika...?"

"If... If... If....."

"If?"

"If you noticed it then say somethinnggggggggg!!"

Rika yelled with a flood of tears running down her face for some reason.

"Rika was so sad when you never reacted any time she changed her hairstyle! Rika was seriously depressed when you didn't react even after she went as far as putting highlights in her hair! It was like you didn't think of Rika as anything more than a little pebble on the side of the road!"

"Eh? Ahh, sorry. But, I mean, come on, do you really think I don't look at you?"

Because God knows what she'll do if I don't keep an eye on her.

Rika's face went red as a beet in an instant.

"Y-you're too late to try and tell me that now! Ahh, you really missed out, Senpai."

"? What did I miss out on?"

"All you had to do was say 'Huh, changed your hair again? Looks good on you,' every time Rika changed her hairstyle to make Rika's affection level skyrocket! It's kind of weird to say it myself, but the Rika route is incredibly easy to clear! If this was an eroge we'd be fucking like rabbits by now! Flags would be flying up left and right; that thing between your legs would be flying up too, Senpai!"

"Eh? Why would I want to raise your affection level?"

"God damn itttttttt!!"

I asked because I thought it was weird, but Rika just yelled back with a crazy look on her face, and hung her head down.

"...Ehhh... You kidding me...? I mean... he was totally serious when he was like 'Eh? Why?' you know. This individual has not the slightest thought of trying to raise Rika's affection level..."

"Hey, Earth to Rika..."

"Ahhh, but Rika is so happy Senpai noticed she was changing her hair! Hell, the fact he even remembered what hairstyles Rika used is making me wet! But he doesn't see me as a target in the least; Rika doesn't even know what to do anymore!"

"I don't know what you're talking about either..."

"Fugahh! Ahh, screw it! I'm all confused now, so I'm gonna go to the Rika room for a little bit to have some sage time while I masturbate!"

After declaring something I wish she hadn't, Rika left the clubroom.

".....Phew... She's as incomprehensible as always..."

Smack! Thwack! Thunk.

As I let out a sigh, Yozora hit me on the forehead with her flyswatter, Sena slapped me with the palm of her hand, and Yukimura punched me in the arm, all at the same time.

"Y-you too, Yukimura...?"

"Aniki... You idiot..."

I guess it'd be better to say Yukimura tapped my arm rather than punched it, but that upset gaze of hers hurt far more than Yozora's and Sena's physical attacks.

"...Rika Shiguma... Such a pitiful girl... No, maybe she's actually enviable...?"

Yozora said as though something were nagging her while fiddling with the hair on the side of her head.

...I don't really get what just happened, but anyway, Yozora resumed playing GirlMemo, so the rest of us returned to watching her.

Once they were in the arcade, a choice to pick what game to play came up, and Yozora selected "Punching Machine".

Apparently Eiji liked the punching machine too, because he was in a good mood the whole day.

Eiji "Today was a lotta fun. Gimmie a call whenever you've got time to kill."

The date ended, and Eiji went home with his trademark bad boy smile.

Looks like their second date was a success too.

Following that, "Yozora" continued to go on dates with Eiji.

Of course, she continued to keep up with her studies and sports in between dates, becoming valedictorian for her class again, as well as doing all sorts of things during the Athletics and Cultural festivals. "Yozora" was living a perfect life that you could call the life of a true normal.

She got along better and better with Eiji as the days went by, and even got to the point where Eiji was asking her on dates instead of the other way around.

Eiji's cheeks blushed after having "Yozora" tell him "I had a lot of fun today."

"...W-what do I do... This guy might seriously be in love with me, don't you think...?"

The real Yozora also blushed and seemed anxious after seeing Eiji's reaction.

"Well, it's obvious he likes being with you."

"I-I see... So he really does..."

Yozora started mumbling her words with a vague expression that looked like she was confused and happy at the same time.

Yozora actually looked kinda cute with the way she was totally sucked into going out with someone in a game.

Her happy days continued, and before she knew it, it was the middle of her third trimester as a junior.

All the students and teachers praised "Yozora" for all the work she'd done up until now, and even nominated her to be the next Student Council President.

Yozora accepted as though it were only natural, and won in the elections by a landslide.

"Kuhaha! I've finally got political power too! I have everything now!"

Yozora laughed loudly like some kind of evil dictator, however ——

Eiji "...Hey, YOZORA. I think we should stop meeting up with each other."

Eiji said all of a sudden, the day after "Yozora" became the Student Council President.

"Wha...!?"

Yozora and "Yozora" were both shocked, but Eiji continued.

Eiji "YOZORA, you're our school's star, and the Student Council President on top of that. Hanging around with a punk like me is just gonna give you a bad rep. I don't want to hold you back, YOZORA."

Following that line, a choice came up.

▼1. "I understand. Let's stop meeting up with each other."

2. "I don't care, I want to be with you, Eiji."

Yozora didn't hesitate, not even for a single second—— She chose option two.

"Hmph, damn fool. Like I care about some worthless reputation a bunch of idiots forced on me. I'll be the one to decide who I want to be with! Stay with me just as you have been!"

Yozora "Please don't say that. I don't care what everyone else thinks of me. I'll be the one to decide who I want to be with. So stay with me, just as you have been!"

They weren't quite exactly the same, but still, "Yozora"'s and Yozora's passionate lines synched up by some coincidence.

"What do I do now... I just thought Yozora was cool..."

"Anego..."

Said Sena and Yukimura respectively, with watery eyes.

Heck, even I felt something from that one just now...

And so, even after becoming a senior and the Student Council President, "Yozora" continued being Eiji's friend.

After having the tragic reason behind Eiji becoming a delinquent revealed (it'd be a spoiler so I won't go into details, but suffice it to say that it was sad enough to cause Sena to burst into tears and to cause the rest of us to get teary-eyed) the two of them deepened their already strong bond with each other.

There were people who didn't think very highly of "Yozora" getting along with a delinquent, but their criticisms were nothing in the face of "Yozora"'s overwhelming might.

Their sparkling days together flew by in an instant——.....

However, one day, just a short while before it was time to graduate, Eiji got into a fight, and was expelled.

Yozora was shocked, however it was clear this event was meant to be the climax of the story, and she continued on, optimistic that she would reach a happy end without question.

However,

After his expulsion, there were no other events with Eiji, and after the graduation ceremony, "Yozora" walked home without anyone to talk to.

Yozora "I managed to get into a first rate university, but I spent a lonely three years here, never really getting along with anybody... Maybe things would've gone better if I were nicer to everyone..."

After her heartrending monologue, the game screen faded to black.

The staff credits then began rolling down the screen along with an incredibly sad song.

"So, I... got a... bad end?"

Yozora stared at the staff credits, lost for words.

"Haaaaa!? What is this bullshit!? What happened to Eiji!?"

Sena screamed in a voice full of rage.

Right after she did, I heard a quiet voice from behind.

"Most likely, we missed a vital flag somewhere along the way."

Rika must've come back to the clubroom without me noticing it.

"Phewww..."

Yozora let out a deep sigh after hearing Rika's hypothesis, and lifelessly hung her head.

Her shoulders were trembling, ever so slightly.

From what I can see, she might actually be crying.

...By the way,

This is something we looked up on a GirlMemo walkthrough later, but apparently in order to solve the final event with Eiji and get a happy end, you need the help of all the other male characters as well as Youko.

If their affection levels for you are too low, then Eiji disappears and the protagonist falls into a depression, unable to save him, culminating in the bad end we saw earlier.

.....If you said Yozora got what she deserved for acting how she did, well, I can't say you'd be wrong.

"...Uhh, umm, please don't take it too hard, Yozora-senpai. The failures are an important part of the game as well. Let's use what we learned this time and take another shot at it. If you'd like, we could even look up some tips online."

Yozora replied to Rika's attempt at being considerate by saying, "No, I'm done..." while looking down at the ground and shaking

her head before going, "Phew!" as she strongly exhaled while lifting her face back up.

"I spent those three years exactly how I wanted to. I'm not going to re-do them. The incident with Eiji was... unfortunate, but... well, if that's the result of living the way I wanted to, then so be it. I... shouldn't have called GirlMemo a shitty game. It was pretty interesting."

Yozora said, her eyes a faint shade of red, in a confident voice that truly held not a trace of regret.

"Besides..."

Yozora took a quick glance over in my direction.

.....?

"I've already got a stupid, friendless yankee in the real world!"

Yozora said, along with an amazingly bright, innocent smile like that of a young boy on her face.

What follows is a short sequel of sorts.

During lunch break the next day, I went to the library to prep for our next World History class.

While it's true I safely made it through the final exams, that doesn't mean World History at this school's gotten any easier.

If I let my guard down and stop studying the material, it's highly likely that I'll fall behind in no time.

Anyway, upon entering the library, I saw my classmate Fu... Fujita(?) sitting at a desk with his textbook and notebook, looking over a test he'd gotten back.

Upon closer inspection, I could see that he was studying modern society.

That reminds me, there were modern society makeup exams today; I bet Fujita took one earlier.

Also, just FYI, the modern society at this school is ridiculously easy compared to World History, and even I managed to get a good grade on the test, but from the way Fujita looks, I'm guessing he's having a hard time with it.

I then happened to remember the cool guys from GirlMemo.

It was just yesterday that I told myself I'd try to act like them and make a bunch of friends.

...Ok!

I made up my mind, and worked up the courage to walk over to Fujita. Fujita's face went stiff when he realized I'd come up to him.

...I was a little shocked, but I guess this is pretty normal, considering I don't talk to him much.

I replayed the scene where "Yozora" met Touma Suzutsuki in my head.

"U-umm... Hey.. Hasegawa...?"

I stood in front of Fujita, and showed him a friendly smile.

"Eek...!?"

Man am I nervous~... Umm... I'm pretty sure this is what Touma said when he first met "Yozora".

"...Want me ta'... teach ya'...!?"

"Eh... T-teach me, w-what exactly?"

...Fujita seemed really nervous for some reason, so I made a gentle smile in order to help calm him down, and then answered his question.

"Byuhehe (huh, that sounded kinda weird), ain't it obvious? I'm gonna show you how society works...!"

"Eeeeeek!? I-I'm sorry, Hasegawa! I don't have any money on me!"

"Huh? Money?"

"Eeeeeeekk!!"

I dunno what he thought I meant, but after saying some nonsense, Fujita quickly grabbed all his books, got up out of his seat, and ran out of the library.

"Ah, hey, Fujita!?"

Why are you running away...?

That day, a rumor that **Kodaka Hasegawa mugged his classmate, Fujita, in the library** started going around.

I guess this is what happens when I try to imitate a bunch of pretty boys from an otomege.

It was truly a harsh way for me to learn how society works...

Time Machine

Upon arriving in the clubroom after school one day, I was greeted by Rika with her hair dyed blond and styled into twintails.

"Hey, changed your hairstyle again I see."

I remembered how just the other day I was told to make sure I point out when a girl changes her hairstyle, hence, I pointed it out for her. I'm such a nice upperclassman, aren't I?

I passed by Rika, who was standing perfectly still near the door while posing like a model, and headed for the table.

Now then, I think I'll do my homework today.

"That's ittttttt!?"

Rika shouted all of a sudden.

"Man you're loud. What do you want?"

"Eh, loud? Well, um... Senpai... About Rika's hair..."

"You changed it, right? Hehe, I made sure to point it out."

"Don't give me that stupid grin! Well, I mean, it's true that I changed my hairstyle, but! I-isn't there something else you noticed too!? There is, right!? Here, look, swish swish~"

Rika ran her hand through her hair and gently flicked it out.

"Umm... ah!"

"Did you figure it out!?"

"You cut your hair?"

"No, I didn't—— You're just messing with me, aren't you!?"

...Crap, I was only trying to tease her a little bit, but she looks really mad.

"It's OK, I know what it is. I was just kidding around."

"Geez... Senpai you're such a tease..."

I gave a smile to Rika, who cutely pursed her lips, and said,

"You changed your hair clip, right? It looks good on you."

"It's the same damn one as before!!"

...Yep, she's definitely mad this time.

After three minutes spent trying to calm her down, I said,

"...So, why'd you dye your hair blond? Trying to look cool?"

"No, I just wanted to try dying it."

"Oh...? So you worked up the courage to go to a beauty parlor?"

"? I don't know why I'd need any courage to go to a beauty parlor, but no, I dyed it myself."

"Those over-the-counter dyes they sell can wreck your hair you know."

I did a little research into hair dyes a while ago, so I know a thing or two about it.

She's got such pretty black hair too, it'd be a waste to ruin it with some dyes.

"Rest easy, Rika used her own special hair dye."

"Your own special hair dye?"

"Hehehe, I used it when I put that red highlight in my hair before too; I'll have you know I'm pretty confident in this hair dye. There's almost no damage to the hair, and while it doesn't fade at all if you wash it with shampoo, it'll come right out if you use the special removal gel on it. How about it? Amazing, isn't it!?"

"Yeah, well, I guess it's kinda amazing?"

"Hehehe... The day this baby enters mass production, the whole hair care business will be turned upside-down... There might even be beauticians who'll come after my life. The fact that it costs about 300 times more to make than the stuff a typical beautician would use is still a problem though..."

Sounds like the day you can buy it in a convenience store is far off.

"Ah, since I've got it here, would you like to try it too, Senpai? You can turn that caramel pudding part of your hair into a brilliant blond like mine. And if you don't like it, you can always put it back to normal right away too."

"Don't call it 'that caramel pudding part'! ...Anyway, no thanks. I don't have the guts to try out some hair dye just cause it happens to be around."

"I see... You're such a chicken, Senpai."

Rika said, seemingly a little bummed out about it.

"Mu... Still, it's like... your inventions are kinda..."

"Yes?"

"It's like... they're really plain."

"They're plain!?"

Rika looked like she just took a huge shock.

"Yeah. I mean, if I had to say whether they're amazing or not, I'd say that they are, but honestly, they're not the kind of inventions that really make you think of a 'genius inventor,' you know...?"

"...P-plain... plain. You're saying that Rika's hair dye masterpiece, which, after lowering the cost and patenting it, would easily make enough money for Rika to spend the rest of her life doing nothing... is plain..."

"Aside from the hair dye, stuff like a useful computer program, or game development tools, or a semi-permanent light bulb, or a pot that warms up without a heat source, or a poison checker, or a cage that raises rhinoceros beetles automatically... Those might be amazing and all, but they're all really pragmatic and don't have much flair... I guess what I want to say is, there's no real romance to them."

"Then what kind of invention do you want me to make!?"

Rika asked, after hearing my honest opinion on the inventions I listed off that she told me about when I asked her before.

I was a little apprehensive given her display of force just now, but after a little thinking,

"Say, for example... a giant robot like the Gamudan ones you like."

"You want me to do something that'd require national funding!? "

"Fine, then a four-dimensional pocket."

"'Fine' he says. How am I supposed to make that? Hell, it'd be even harder to make than the giant robot."

"It would be? Hmm, then how about a flashlight that can make things bigger or smaller by shining light on them, or a piece of cloth that can fix broken things by wrapping it around them, or a type of konjac that lets you learn any language you want... No, wait, I know! How about a time machine!?"

"Uwa~n, Nuraemo~n! Quick, give me an imagine breaker that can destroy Senpai's 12-year-old boy level sci-fi delusions~!"

...Anyway, the day after that little comedy routine with Rika, I went to the clubroom again.

"And so, I made it. That time machine."

Rika made her ambiguous sentence-fragment of a statement as she stood before Yozora, Sena, Yukimura, and I.

"Huh?"

"Like I said, I made the time machine, just like you asked me to, Senpai. You can now travel through time."

Rika gave a nonchalant explanation to the rest of us, all wearing stupid looks on our faces.

Rika was holding a helmet-like visor device that looked like the head mount display we used when we played 'Romancing Saga' in her hand.

"...Eh... You can go to the past or the future with that thing?"

Sena seemed to be half in doubt... No, I take that back. She was completely in doubt as she asked Rika her question.

"Yes. However it's only your consciousness that can travel."

"Only my consciousness?"

Rika began her explanation to us, who all looked even more confused than before.

According to her, this time machine works like a certain cat-shaped robot's time machine in that rather than actually going back in time, you leave your physical body behind, and send your current consciousness into a you from a different period in time.

She also mentioned something about because only information is sent, there's no possibility of an inconsistency occurring where two of you exist at once.

"This time machine can only go into the past though."

"No no no no..."

This thing is already amazing as is.

"You've gotta be kidding, right? I mean, this is time travel... I read about it in some book once... It said that time travel was completely impossible."

"If you think it's a lie, then go ahead and try it."

Rika wore an utterly serious expression.

Even so, I really can't bring myself to believe that a toy like this can take you into the past.

"OK, I'll try it out... It's safe, right?"

"Yes, it is. I'll set it so you come back after five minutes."

Rika wormed her way over to me, time machine in hand.

"Now come on, Senpai, have a seat in that chair."

"S-sure..."

I moved over and sat down as instructed.

"Aniki..." "...This thing really is safe, right?"

Yukimura and Yozora both wore worried looks on their faces.

"Relax, it's safe. Have a little faith in the mad scientist Rika Shiguma."

"You're not helping."

"Don't sweat the small stuff. Here we go."

Rika placed the time machine on my head.

Having my head held in place, unable to see anything, caused an indescribable feeling of anxiousness to run through me.

"OK then, I'll be starting up the machine now. Close your eyes, and strongly imagine the time you wish to return to, Senpai."

...The time I want to return to... is it.....

I still don't believe time travel is possible in the least, but even so, if I were truly able to go back in time, then——

I strongly imagined what happened on "that day".

The next instant, the time machine started vibrating faintly, and I could hear a strange voice near my ears.

I don't know what it's trying to say, but it's a gentle voice that sounds like some kind of therapeutic music.

It feels like my consciousness is going to fly away just by listening to it——...

.....——When I came to, I was beneath an orange tinted sky, sitting on a bench.

I was in that park I was all too familiar with.

"...A-are you serious...? D-did I really travel through time...!?"

Rika Shiguma... The word "genius" doesn't do you justice... Isn't it against the rules to be this amazing?

"What are you muttering about, Taka?"

Hearing a voice come from right next to me all of a sudden surprised me so much I nearly jumped up.

Next to me was a single boy—— No, that's not it. The person next to me was a **girl** who wore men's clothes, a cap, had short black hair, and possessed an intellectual, extremely refined appearance.

"Ah, no, it's nothing..."

What came from my mouth was a pre-pubescent high pitched voice that sounded nothing like my own.

"You're weird. Well, whatever... So it's a promise for tomorrow then, OK?"

The girl, Sora, said before getting up off the bench.

There's no doubt about it... This is *that day*.

Ten years ago—— The day Sora and I parted with each other.

We both promised to tell "something important" to each other tomorrow, however, Sora never came.

"See ya', Taka."

Sora began to walk away.

I can't let her go. If I let her leave, we won't meet again for ten whole years.

We'll have to wait for ten years.

Yozora will fall into sadness over those ten years.

Even if we can't avoid going our separate ways, we have to at least give each other a proper goodbye.

"Yozora, wait!"

"!?"

A shocked expression rose to Yozora's face as she turned around.

"T-Taka, why do you know my name...!?"

"I know I said I'd tell you about it tomorrow, but I changed my mind! I'm telling you now!"

"Ehh!?"

Yozora's expression became even more confused.

"I'm leaving this town the day after tomorrow—— I won't be back for ten years! The last day I can meet you until then is tomorrow!"

I screamed. I screamed the things I wasn't able to tell her ten years ago.

I'm sorry I never told you. I betrayed you.

Ten years later, I met with Yozora, and we talked about what happened, but that doesn't change the fact that we had to go through this sad farewell. So, at the very least, I wanted to apologize.

"Taka..."

Yozora mumbled, taken aback by my sudden shouting.

"I'm sorry... but I'll always be your friend, even if I'm far away! I'll never forget you!"

That's such a barefaced lie.

I'm the one who forgot all about it until I came back here. I wasn't even able to remember what my friend looked like.

"Sorry... Yozora..."

I deeply bowed my head.

To be honest, I wasn't even sure what exactly it was that I was apologizing for.

In response to my apology, Yozora said——

"——Too bad. I won't forgive you. If you want me to, then die!"

"Ehhh!?"

No sooner had I yelled, than had Yozora come charging at me all of a sudden.

She completely destroyed that bitter, painful atmosphere, and switched to violence!

I barely managed to avoid Yozora's flying kick by dropping to the ground.

I went pale when I saw that the bench behind me was now in pieces after receiving Yozora's attack.

"Wai- Eh- Y-Yozora!?"

"I am not Yozora. My name is Nomikoto Kokuten... I, you, devour!"

Yozora hit the ground with a flyswatter she grabbed without my noticing, causing the ground to shake violently.

T-this is no joke...! She's gonna kill me...!

I ran away from Yozora with all my might. I heard a high pitched "swoosh!" as something cut through the air. It was an arrow that came flying at me from behind, cutting up the sleeves of my shirt.

I turned around, and saw Yozora carrying a super heavy crossbow from Mon Hunt.

"Wait, Yozora, you'll seriously kill me with that thing!!"

"Silence. You—— are simply meat. Writhe around like the scum you are, and then die!"

I desperately continued dodging the onslaught of arrows fired from Yozora's crossbow, screaming like a girl all the while.

"Persistent wretch—— I think it's about time I show you my true form! Asutarou Mode!"

"Your true form!?"

I looked back by reflex, and saw that Yozora's head had turned into a horse's. Her clothes were different now too; she was wearing the white gakuran from Teiritsu Galford Academy.

"Why are you wearing that!?"

"Kodaka... you belong to me!"

Yozora aimed a giant firework at me, and let loose a huge beam.

"Uwaaaaaa! I'm begging you, Yozora, stop it! Forgive me, Yozoraaaaaaa!!"

I was swallowed up by a torrent of multicolored lights—— and then fell unconscious.

"Uwaaaaaaaaaa!?"

I opened my eyes while screaming, and saw that I was in the clubroom.

Yozora, Sena, Rika, and Yukimura were all looking at me full of worry.

"Haa... Haa... Haa..."

My breathing is wild, my heart feels like it's about to jump out of my chest. My hands are covered in sweat too.

"Umm... Kodaka-senpai, are you all right?"

The inventor of the time machine, Rika, nervously asked.

"Y-yeah... I'm OK... I think..."

I answered, still feeling disoriented after everything that just happened.

"Ah, I get it. I came back to the present because five minutes have passed. Thank God..."

Rika made an apologetic face as she watched me breathe a sigh of relief.

"Rika...?"

"I'm sorry, Senpai. I lied when I said this was a time machine."

"Wha...!?"

"It's actually just a machine that uses hypnotism to lure you to sleep, and then lets you dream about whatever you imagined strongly."

I was in utter shock after hearing Rika's explanation.

"Eh... So just now... that was all a dream...?"

So I didn't go back to past at all...?

Rika let her head dangle dejectedly.

"...I was only planning on teasing you a little bit, but... it looks like you had an incredibly bad nightmare... I'm very sorry for what I did."

Seeing her apologize so seriously makes me want to do the same.

"Nah, it's OK... Sorry for calling your inventions plain and stuff yesterday. This thing's pretty amazing, even if it isn't a time machine. ...And besides, aside from the weird stuff at the end, it really did feel like I went back in time..."

It may have only been a dream, but I got to say what I wasn't able to before.

It's nothing more than my own self-satisfaction, but even so, I feel strangely relieved.

"So, you mean that you were able to go into the past within your dream, right?"

"Yeah, to ten years ago."

"Oh...? Ten years ago, is it...?"

.....?

I don't know why, but Rika squinted her eyes all of a sudden.

Having someone look at you like they've seen completely through you is kinda scary, so I averted my eyes in response.

After doing so, I met eyes with Sena instead.

Sena was staring me down too for some reason.

"...Hey, Kodaka. There's something I wanna ask you."

"Hm?"

"You just saw a dream of ten years in the past, right?"

"Eh? Yeah. The end was kinda weird though..."

Sena thinned her eyes upon hearing my answer—— and then asked, in an almost accusatory tone of voice,

"...If it was a dream from ten years ago, then why was Yozora in it?"

(The End)